ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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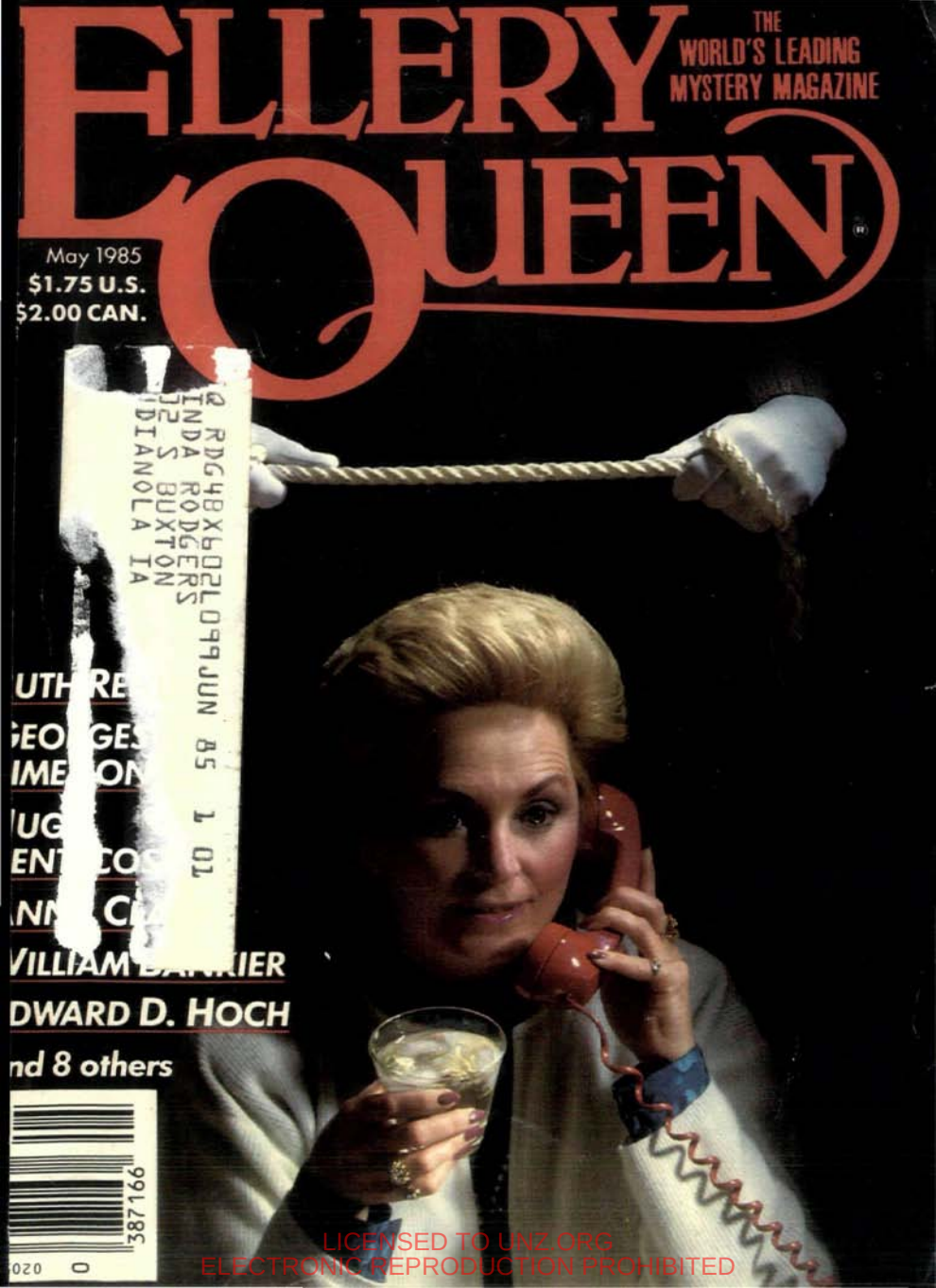

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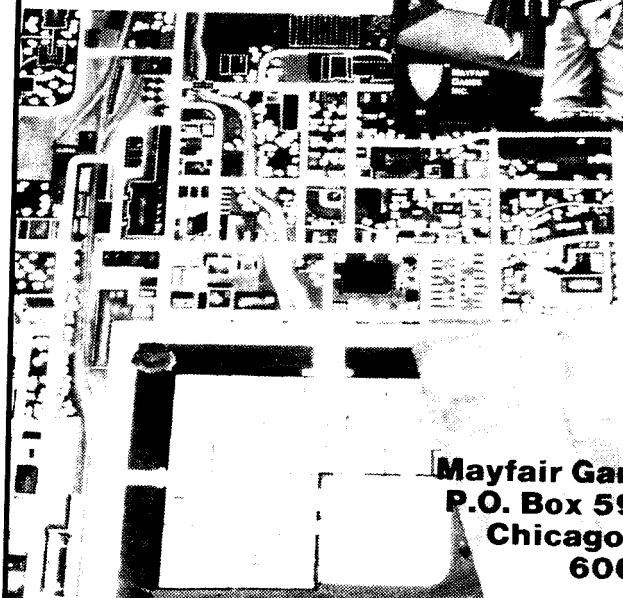

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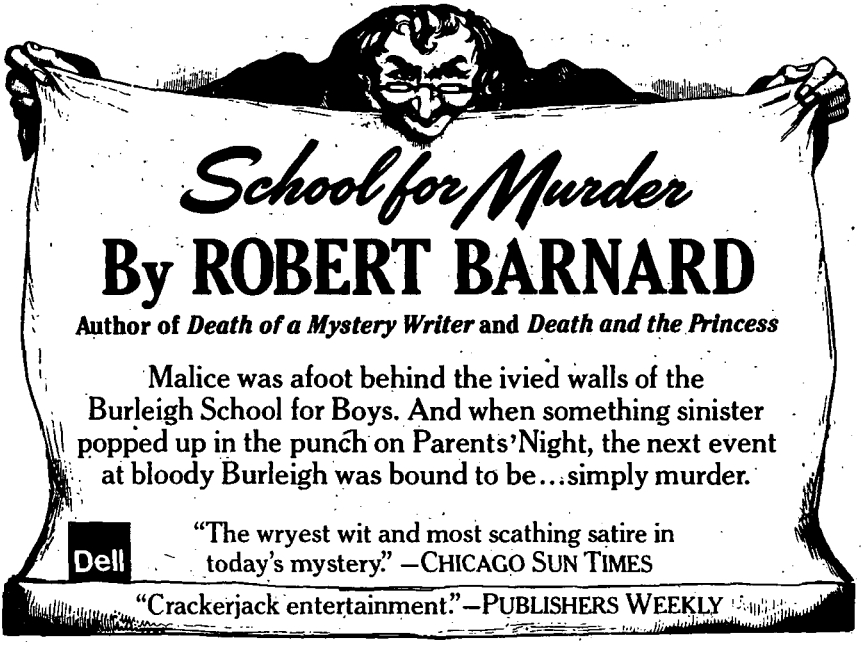
School for Murder
By ROBERT BARNARD
Author of Death of a Mystery Writer and Death and the Princess
Malice was afoot behind the ivied walls of the Burleigh School for Boys. And when something sinister popped up in the punch on Parents' Night, the next event at bloody Burleigh was bound to be...simply murder.
Dell
"The wryest wit and most scathing satire in today's mystery." —CHICAGO SUN TIMES
"Crackerjack entertainment."—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

DETECTIVERSE

BRUSH WITH DEATH

by MARK GRENIER

An unfortunate artist named Dow
Has been killed at his easel somehow,
But I can't tell you why
Nor who caused him to die
Because everything's sketchy right now.

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

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They drove to Inchfield through deep green silent lanes—silent, that is, but for the occasional sound of a shot. She, only fourteen then, thought it must be something to do with the war, without specifying to herself what. "The war?" said Daniel as if this were something happening ten thousand miles away. He laughed the age-old laugh of the countryman scoring off the townee. "You'll find no war here. That's some chap out after rabbits . . ."

THE ORCHARD WALLS

by RUTH RENDELL

I have never told anyone this before.

The worst was long over, of course. Intense shame had faded and the knowledge of having made the greatest possible fool of myself. Forty years and more had done their work there. The feeling I had been left with, that I was precocious in a foul and dirty way, that I was unclean, was washed away. I had done my best never to think about it, to blot it all out, never to permit to ring on my inward ear Mrs. Thorn's words: "How dare you say such a thing! How dare you be so disgusting! At your age, a child, you must be sick in your mind."

Things would bring it back—the scent of honeysuckle, a brace of bloodied pigeons hanging in a butcher's window, the first cherries of the season. I winced at these things, I grew hot with a shadow of that blush that had set me on fire with shame under the tree, Daniel's hard hand gripping my shoulder, Mrs. Thorn trembling with indignant rage. The memory, never completely exorcised, still had the power to punish the adult for the child's mistake.

Until today.

Having one's childhood trauma cured by an analyst must be like this. Only a newspaper has cured mine. The newspaper came through my door and told me I hadn't been disgusting or sick in my mind, I had been right. In the broad facts at least I had been right. All day I have been asking myself what I should do—what action,

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if any, I should take. At last I have been able to think about it all quite calmly—in tranquility, to think of Ella and Dennis Clifton without growing hot and ashamed, of Mrs. Thorn with pity, and of that lovely lost place with something like nostalgia.

It was a long time ago. I was fourteen. Is that to be a child? They thought so. I thought so myself at the time. But the truth was I was a child and not a child, at one and the same time a paddler in streams, a climber of trees, an expert at cartwheels—and with an imagination full of romantic love. I was in a stage of transition, a pupa, a chrysalis.

Bombs were falling on London. Plymouth had been devastated and Coventry burned. I had already once been evacuated with my school and come back again to the suburb we lived in that sometimes seemed safe and sometimes not. My parents were afraid for me and that was why they sent me to Inchfield, to the Thorns. I could see the fear in my mother's eyes and it made me uncomfortable.

"Just till the end of August," she said, pleading with me. "It's beautiful there. You could think of it as an extra long summer holiday."

I remembered Hereford and my previous "billet," the strange people, the alien food.

"This will be different. Ella is your own aunt."

She was my mother's sister, her junior by twelve years. There were a brother and sister in between, both living in the north. Ella's husband was a farmer in Suffolk, or had been. He was in the army, and his elder brother ran the farm. Later, when Ella was dead and Philip Thorn married again and all I kept of them was that shameful thing I did my best to forget, I discovered that Ella had married Philip when she was seventeen because she was pregnant, and in the Thirties any alternative to marriage in those circumstances was unthinkable. She had married him and six months later given birth to a dead child. When I went to Inchfield she was still only twenty-five, still childless, living with a brother-in-law and mother-in-law in the depths of the country, her husband fighting in North Africa.

I didn't want to go. At fourteen one isn't afraid; one knows one is immortal. After an air raid, we used to go about the streets collecting pieces of shrapnel, fragments of shell. The worst thing to me was having to sleep under a Morrison shelter instead of in my bedroom. Having a room of my own again, a place to be private in, was an inducement. I yielded. To this day I don't know if I was invited or

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if my mother had simply written to say that I was coming, that I must come, that they must give me refuge.

It was the second week of June when I went. Daniel Thorn met me at the station at Ipswich. I was wildly romantic, far too romantic, my head full of fantasies and dreams. Knowing I should be met, I expected a pony carriage or even a man on a black stallion leading a chestnut mare for me, though I had never in my life been on a horse. He came in an old Ford van.

We drove to Inchfield through deep green silent lanes—silent, that is, but for the occasional sound of a shot. I thought it must be something to do with the war, without specifying to myself what.

"The war?" said Daniel as if this were something happening ten thousand miles away. He laughed the age-old laugh of the countryman scoring off the townee. "You'll find no war here. That's some chap out after rabbits."

Rabbit was what we were to live on—stewed, roasted, in pies—relieved by wood pigeon. It was a change from London sausages, but I have never eaten rabbit since, not once. The characteristic smell of it cooking, experienced once in a friend's kitchen, brought me violent nausea. What a devil's menu that would have been for me, stewed rabbit and cherry pie!

The first sight of the farm enchanted me. The place where I lived in Hereford had been a late Victorian brick cottage, red and raw and ugly as poverty. I had scarcely seen a house like Cherry Tree Farm except on a calendar. It was long and low and thatched, and its two great barns were thatched, too. The low green hills and the dark clustering woods hung behind it. And scattered all over the wide slopes of grass were the cherry trees, one so close up to the house as to rub its branches against a windowpane.

They came out of the front door to meet us, Ella and Mrs. Thorn, and Ella gave me a white, rather cold cheek to kiss. She didn't smile. She looked bored. It was better, therefore, than I had expected, and worse. Ella was worse and Mrs. Thorn was better. The place was ten times better. Tea was like something I hadn't had since before the war. My bedroom was not only nicer than the Morrison shelter, it was nicer than my bedroom at home. Mrs. Thorn took me up there when we had eaten the scones and currant bread and walnut cake.

It was low-ceilinged, with the stone-colored studs showing through the plaster. A patchwork quilt was on the bed and the walls were

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hung with a paper patterned all over with bundles of cherries. I looked out of the window.

"You can't see the cherry trees from here," I said. "Is that why they put cherries on the walls?"

The idea seemed to puzzle her. She was a simple, conservative woman. "I don't know about that. That would be rather whimsical."

I was at the back of the house. My window overlooked a trim dull garden of rosebuds cut out in segments of a circle. Mrs. Thorn's own garden, I was later to learn, and tended by herself.

"Who sleeps in the room with the cherry tree?" I said.

"Your auntie." Mrs. Thorn was always to refer to Ella in this way. She was a stickler for respect. "That has always been my son Philip's room."

Always. I envied the absent soldier. A tree with branches against one's bedroom window represented to me something down which one could climb and make one's escape, perhaps even without the aid of knotted sheets. I said as much, toning it down for my companion, who I guess would see it in a different light.

"I'm sure he did no such thing," said Mrs. Thorn. "He wasn't that kind of boy."

Those words stamped Philip for me as dull. I wondered why Ella had married him. What had she seen in this unromantic chap, five years her senior, who hadn't been the kind of boy to climb down trees out of his bedroom window? Or climb up them, come to that.

She was beautiful. For the first Christmas of the war I had been given *Picturegoer Annual*, in which was a full-page photograph of Hedy Lamarr. Ella looked just like her. She had the same perfect features, dark hair, other-worldly eyes fixed on far horizons. I can see her now—I can *permit* myself to see her—as she was then, thin, long-legged, in the floral cotton dress with collar and cuffs and narrow belt that would be fashionable again today. Her hair was pinned up in a roll off her forehead, the rest left hanging to her shoulders in loose curls, mouth painted like raspberry jam, eyes as nature made them, large, dark, alight with some emotion I was years from analyzing. I think now it was compounded of rebellion and longing and desire.

Sometimes in the early evenings she would disappear upstairs and then Mrs. Thorn would say in a respectful voice that she had gone to write to Philip. We used to listen to the wireless. Of course, no one knew exactly where Philip was, but we all had a good idea he was somehow involved in the attempts to relieve Tobruk. At news

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times, Mrs. Thorn became very tense. Once, to my embarrassment, she made a choking sound and left the room, covering her eyes with her hand. Ella switched off the set.

"You ought to be in bed," she said to me. "When I was your age I was always in bed by eight."

I envied and admired her, even though she was never particularly nice to me and seldom spoke except to say I "ought" to be doing something or other. Did she look at this niece, not much more than ten years younger than herself, and see what she herself had thrown away—a future of hope, a chance of living?

I spent very little time with her. It was Mrs. Thorn who took me shopping with her to Ipswich, who talked to me while she did the baking, who knitted and taught me to knit. There was no wool to be had so we picked old jumpers and washed the wool and carded it and started again. I was with her most of the time. It was either that or being on my own. No doubt there were children of my own age in the village I might have got to know but the village was two miles away. I was allowed to go out for walks but not to ride the only bicycle they had.

"It's too large for you. It's a twenty-eight inch," Mrs. Thorn said. "Besides, it's got a crossbar."

I said I could easily swing my leg behind the saddle like a man.

"Not while you're staying with me."

I didn't understand. "I wouldn't hurt myself." I said what I said to my mother. "I wouldn't come to any harm."

"It isn't ladylike," said Mrs. Thorn, and that was that.

Those things mattered a lot to her. She stopped me turning cartwheels on the lawn when Daniel was about, even though I wore shorts. Then she made me wear a skirt. But she was kind, she paid me a lot of attention. If I had had to depend on Ella or the occasional word from Daniel, I might have looked forward more eagerly to my parents' fortnightly visits than I did.

After I had been there two or three weeks, the cherries began to turn color. Daniel, coming upon me looking at them, said they were an old variety called Inchfield White Heart.

"There used to be a cherry festival here," he said. "The first Sunday after July the twelfth it was. There'd be dancing and a supper. You'd have enjoyed yourself. Still, we never had one last year and we're not this and somehow I don't reckon there'll ever be a cherry festival again what with this old war."

He was a yellow-haired, red-complexioned Suffolk man, big and

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thickset. His wide mouth, sickle-shaped, had its corners permanently turned upward. It wasn't a smile, though, and he was seldom cheerful. I never heard him laugh. He used to watch people in a rather disconcerting way, Ella especially. And when guests came to the house, Dennis Clifton or Mrs. Leithman or some of the farming people they knew, he would sit and watch them, seldom contributing a word.

One evening when I was coming back from a walk, I saw Ella and Dennis Clifton kissing in the wood.

Dennis Clifton wasn't a farmer. He had been in the R.A.F., had been a fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain, but had received some sort of head injury, been in hospital and was now on leave at home recuperating. He must have been very young, no more than twenty-two or -three. While he was ill, his mother, with whom he had lived and who had been a friend of Mrs. Thorn's, had died and left him her pretty little Georgian house in Inchfield. He was often at the farm, ostensibly to see his mother's old friend.

After these visits, Daniel used to say, "He'll soon be back in the thick of it," or "It won't be long before he's up there in his Spitfire. He can't wait."

This made me watch him, too, looking for signs of impatience to return to the R.A.F. His hands shook sometimes; they trembled like an old man's. He, too, was fair-haired and blue-eyed, yet there was all the difference in the world between his appearance and Daniel's. Film stars set my standard of beauty, and I thought he looked like Leslie Howard playing Ashley Wilkes. He was tall and thin and sensitive and his eyes were sad. Daniel watched him and Ella sat and I read my book while he talked very kindly and encouragingly to Mrs. Thorn about her son Philip, about how confident he was Philip would be all right, would survive, and while he talked his eyes grew sadder and more veiled.

No—I imagined that, not remembered it. It is in the light of what I came to know that I have imagined it. He was simply considerate and kind, like the well brought up young man he was.

I had been in the river. There was a place about a mile upstream they called the weir, where for a few yards the banks were built up with concrete below a shallow falls. A pool about four feet deep had formed there and on hot days I went bathing in it. Mrs. Thorn would have stopped me if she had known, but she didn't know. She didn't even know I had a bathing costume with me.

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The shortest way was back through the wood. I heard a shot and then another from up in the meadows. Daniel was out after pigeons. The wood was dim and cool, full of soft twitterings, feathers rustling against dry leaves. The bluebells were long past, but dog's mercury was in flower, a white powdering, and the air was scented with honeysuckle. Another shot came, farther off but enough to shatter peace, and there was a rush of wings as pigeons took flight. Through the black trunks of trees and the lacework of their branches, I could see the yellow sky and the sun burning in it, still an hour off setting.

Ella was leaning against the trunk of a chestnut, looking up into Dennis Clifton's face. He had his hands pressed against the trunk, on either side of her head. If she had ever been nice to me, if he had ever said more than hello, I think I might have called out to them. I didn't call and in a moment I realized the last thing they would want was to be seen.

I stayed where I was. I watched them. Oh, I was in no way a voyeur. There was nothing lubricious in it, nothing of curiosity, still less a wish to catch them out. I was overwhelmed rather by the romance of it, ravished by wonder. I watched him kiss her. He took his hands down and put his arms round her and kissed her so that their faces were no longer visible, only his fair head and her dark hair and their locked straining shoulders. I caught my breath and shivered in the warm half light, in the honeysuckle air.

They left the place before I did, walking slowly away in the direction of the road, arms about each other's waists.

In the room at Cherry Tree Farm they still called the parlor, Mrs. Thorn and Daniel were sitting, listening to the wireless, drinking tea. No more than five minutes afterward, Ella came in. I had seen what I had seen, but if I hadn't, wouldn't I still have thought her looks extraordinary, her shining eyes and the flush on her white cheek, the willow leaf in her hair and the bramble clinging to her skirt?

Daniel looked at her. There was blood in his fingernails, though he had scrubbed his hands. It brought me a flicker of nausea. Ella put her fingers through her hair, plucked out the leaf, and went upstairs.

"She is going up to write to Philip," said Mrs. Thorn.

Why wasn't I shocked? Why wasn't I horrified? I was only fourteen and I came from a conventional background. Adultery was something committed by people in the Bible. I suppose I could say I had

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seen no more than a kiss and adultery didn't enter into it. Yet I knew it did. With no experience, with only the scantiest knowledge, I sensed that this love had its full consummation. I knew Ella was married to a soldier who was away fighting for his country. I even knew that my parents would think behavior such as hers despicable, if not downright wicked. But I cared for none of that. To me it was romance, it was Lancelot and Guinevere, it was a splendid and beautiful adventure that was happening to two handsome young people—as one day it might happen to me.

I was no go-between. For them I scarcely existed. I received no words or smiles, still less messages to be carried. They had the phone, anyway. They had cars. But though I took no part in their love affair and wasn't even with accuracy able to calculate the times when it was conducted, it filled my thoughts. Outwardly, I followed the routine of days I had arranged for myself and Mrs. Thorn had arranged for me, but my mind was occupied with Dennis and Ella, assessing what meeting places they would use, imagining their conversations—their vows of undying love—and recreating with cinematic variations that kiss.

My greatest enjoyment, my finest hours of empathy, were when he called. I watched the two of them as intently then as Daniel did. Sometimes I fancied I caught between them a glance of longing, and once I actually witnessed something more—an encounter between them in the passage when Ella came from the kitchen with the tea tray and Dennis had gone to fetch something from his car for Mrs. Thorn. Unseen by them, I stood in the shadow between the grandfather clock and the foot of the stairs. I heard him whisper:

"Tonight? Same place?" She nodded, her eyes wide. I saw him put his hand on her shoulder in a slow caress as he went past her.

I slept badly those nights. It had become very hot. Mrs. Thorn made sure I was in bed by nine and there was no way of escaping from the house after that without being seen by her. I envied Ella with a tree outside her window down which it would be easy to climb and escape. I imagined going down to the river in the moonlight, walking in the wood, perhaps seeing my lovers in some trysting place. My lovers, whose breathy words and laden glances exalted me and rarefied the overheated air.

The cherries were turning pale yellow, with a blush coming to their cheeks. It was the first week of July, the week the war came to Inchfield and a German bomber, lost and off-course, unloaded a stick of bombs in one of the Thorns' fields.

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No one was hurt, though a cow got killed. We went to look at the mess in the meadow, the crater and the uprooted tree. Daniel shook his fist at the sky. The explosions had made a tremendous noise, and we were all sensitive after that to any sudden sound. Even the crack of Daniel's shotgun made his mother jump.

The heat had turned sultry and clouds obscured our blue skies, though no rain fell. Mrs. Leithman, coming to tea as she usually did once a week, told us she fancied each roll of thunder was another bomb. We hardly saw Ella, she was always up in her room or out somewhere—out with Dennis, of course. I speculated about them, wove fantasies around them, imagined Philip Thorn killed in battle and thereby setting them free. So innocent was I, living in more innocent or at least more puritanical times, that the possibility of this childless couple being divorced never struck me. Nor did I envisage Dennis and Ella married to each other but only continuing forever their perilous enchanting idyll. I even found Juliet's lines for them—Juliet, who was my own age—and whispered to myself that "the orchard walls are high and hard to climb; and the place death, considering who thou art . . ." Once, late at night when I couldn't sleep and sat in my window, I saw the shadowy figure of Dennis Clifton emerge from the deep darkness at the side of the house and leave by the gate out of the rose garden.

But the destruction of it all and my humiliation were drawing nearer. I had settled down there, I had begun to be happy. The truth is, I suppose, that I identified with Ella and in my complex fantasies it was I, compounded with Juliet, that Dennis met and embraced and touched and loved. My involvement was much deeper than that of an observer.

When it came, the shot sounded very near. It woke me up as such a sound might not have done before the bombs. I wondered what prey Daniel could go in search of at this hour, for the darkness was deep, velvety, and still. The crack which had split the night and jarred the silence wasn't repeated. I went back to sleep and slept till past dawn.

I got up early as I did most mornings, came downstairs in the quiet of the house, the hush of a fine summer morning, and went outdoors. Mrs. Thorn was in the kitchen, frying fat bacon and duck eggs for the men. I didn't know if it was all right for me to do this or if all the cherries were reserved for some mysterious purpose, but as I went toward the gate I reached up and picked a ripe one from

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a dipping branch. It was the crispest, sweetest cherry I had ever tasted, though I must admit I have eaten few since then. I pushed the stone into the earth just inside the gates. Perhaps it germinated and grew. Perhaps quite an old tree that has borne many summer loads of fruit now stands at the entrance to Cherry Tree.

As it happened, of all their big harvest, that was the only cherry I was ever to eat there. Coming back half an hour later, I pushed open the gate and stood for a moment looking at the farmhouse over whose sunny walls and roof the shadows of the trees lay in a slanted leafy pattern. I looked at the big tree, laden with red-gold fruit, that rubbed its branches against Ella's window. In its boughs, halfway up, in a fork a yard or two from the glass, hung the body of a man.

In the hot sunshine I felt icy cold. I remember the feeling to this day, the sensation of being frozen by a cold that came from within while outside me the sun shone and a thrush sang and the swallows dipped in and out under the eaves. My eyes seemed fixed, staring in the hypnosis of shock and fear at the fair-haired dangling man, his head thrown back in the agony of death there outside Ella's bedroom window.

At least I wasn't hysterical. I resolved I must be calm and adult. My teeth were chattering. I walked stiffly into the kitchen, and there they all were, around the table, Daniel and the two men and Ella and, at the head of it, Mrs. Thorn pouring tea.

I meant to go quietly up to her and whisper it. I couldn't. To get myself there without running, stumbling, shouting had used up all the control I had. The words rushed out in a loud ragged bray and I remember holding up my hands, my fists clenched.

"Mr. Clifton's been shot. He's been shot, he's dead. His body's in the cherry tree outside Ella's window!"

There was silence. But first a clatter as of knives and forks dropped, of cups rattled into saucers, of chairs scraped. Then this utter stricken silence. I have never—not in all the years since then—seen anyone go as white as Ella went. She was as white as paper, and her eyes were black holes. A brick color suffused Daniel's face. He swore. He used words that made me shrink and draw back and shiver and stare from one to the other of the horrible, horrified faces. Mrs. Thorn was the first to speak, her voice cold with anger. "How dare you say such a thing! How dare you be so disgusting! At your age—you must be sick in your mind!"

Daniel had jumped up. He took me roughly by the arm. But his grasp wasn't firm—the hand was shaking the way Dennis's shook.

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He manhandled me out there, his mother scuttling behind us. We were still five or six yards from the tree when I saw. The hot blood came into my face and throbbed under my skin. I looked at the cloth face, the yellow wool hair—our own unpicked, carded wool—the stuffed sacking body, the cracked boots. Icy with indignation, Mrs. Thorn said, "Haven't you ever seen a scarecrow before?"

I cried out desperately, as if, even in the face of this evidence, I could still prove them wrong, "But scarecrows are in fields!"

"Not in this part of the world." Daniel's voice was thin and hoarse. He couldn't have looked more gaunt, more shocked, if it had really been Dennis Clifton in that tree. "In this part of the world we put them on cherry trees. I put it there last night. I put *them* there." And he pointed at what I had passed but never seen, the man in the tree by the wall, the man in the tree in the middle of the green lawn.

I went back to the house and up to my room and lay on the bed, prone and silent with shame. The next day was Saturday, and my parents were coming. They would tell them, and I should be taken home in disgrace. In the middle of the day Mrs. Thorn came to the door and said to come down to lunch. She was a changed woman, hard and dour. I had never heard the expression "to draw aside one's skirts" but later on when I did I recognized that this was what she had done to me. Her attitude to me was as if I were some sort of psychopath.

We had lunch alone, only I didn't really have any. I couldn't eat. Just as we were finishing and I was pushing aside my laden plate, Daniel came in and sat down and said they had all talked about it and they thought it would be best if I went home with my parents the following day. "Of course I shall tell them exactly what you said and what you inferred," said Mrs. Thorn. "I shall tell them how you insulted your auntie."

Daniel, who wasn't trembling any more or any redder in the face than usual, considered this for a moment in silence. Then he said unexpectedly—or unexpectedly to me, "No, we won't, Mother, we won't do that. No point in that. The fewer know the better. You've got to think of Ella's reputation."

"I won't have her here," his mother said.

"No, I agree with that. She can tell them she's homesick or I'll say it's too much for you, having her here."

Ella hid herself away all that day.

"She has her letter to write to Philip," said Mrs. Thorn.

In the morning she was at the table with the others. Daniel made

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an announcement. He had been down to the village and heard that Dennis Clifton was back in the Air Force. He had rejoined his squadron. "He'll soon be back in the thick of it," he said.

Ella sat with bowed head, working with restless fingers a slice of bread into a heap of crumbs. Her face was colorless, lacking her usual makeup. I don't remember ever hearing another word from her. I packed my things. My parents made no demur about taking me back with them. Starved of love, sickened by the love of others, I clung to my father. The scarecrows grinned at us as we got into the van behind Daniel. I can see them now—I can permit myself to see them now—spread-eagled in the trees, protecting the reddening fruit, so lifelike that even the swallows swooped in wider arcs around them.

In the following spring Ella died giving birth to another dead child. My mother cried, for Ella had been her little sister. But she was shy about giving open expression to her grief. She and my father were anxious to keep from me, or for that matter anyone else, that it was a good fifteen months since Philip Thorn was home on leave. What became of Daniel and his mother I never knew, I didn't want to know. I couldn't avoid hearing that Philip had married again and his new wife was a niece of Mrs. Leithman's.

Only a meticulous reader of newspapers would have spotted this paragraph. I am in the habit of reading every line, with the exception of the sports news, and I spotted this item tucked away between an account of sharp practice in local government and the suicide of a financier. I read it. The years fell away, and the facts exonerated me. I knew I must do something and wondered what. I have been thinking of it all day, but now I know I must tell this story to the coroner. My story, my mistake, Daniel's rage.

An agricultural worker had come upon an unexploded bomb on farmland near Inchfield in Suffolk. It was thought to be one of a stick of bombs dropped there in 1941. Excavations in the area had brought to light a skeleton thought to be that of a young man who had met his death at about the same time. A curious fact was that shotgun pellets had been found in the cavity of the skull.

"The orchard walls are high and hard to climb; and the place death, considering who thou art, if any of my kinsmen find thee here . . ."

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a *NEW* Hollywood ad man story by

RON GOULART

"He's just an actor, you know." Ezra Gates sank down to sit on a cathedral step. "There's not really a Barbecue Bob, only a conglomerate based in Texas someplace." He nodded toward the giant grinning face across the hazy avenue. "His real name is Barry Katchall. He's fifty-one years old and he's stolen Zinia from me . . ."

BARBECUE BOB

by RON GOULART

Although he may end up in prison, he'll probably make at least $100,000 this year. That's not bad money, even these days. And the prison sentence may be light, only a few years. But, of course, what he originally had in mind was making at least $750,000 and never seeing the inside of a cell. What rankles, too, is that he'll be getting the money not for being clever and cunning, but simply because his plan got screwed up the way it did and made him an instant celebrity of sorts. Two of the television networks are bidding for the rights to turn his life into a movie and close to a dozen magazines and tabloids are anxious to buy his exclusive story.

He hadn't come up with his plan the hot, hazy morning I encountered him on Fifth Avenue. My advertising agency had sent me East from Los Angeles because one of our clients was having some trouble launching a new soft drink in the tri-state marketing area. The stuff was called NoKo, a revolutionary cola that contained no sugar, no caffeine, and absolutely nothing artificial. Initial consumer reaction had been less than satisfactory. People were saying NoKo tasted like tap water.

I almost stepped on Ezra Gates and passed on. He was sprawled

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on a lower step of St. Norbert's Cathedral, sound asleep amidst a scatter of weatherbeaten and trod-upon lithographs. Ezra was wearing tattered maroon sweatpants, very old Adidas running shoes, no socks, and a T-shirt that featured the faded slogan *Kiss Me! I'm Serbo-Croatian!* across its hole-riddled back. His sandy hair was too long, his beard at least a week old.

Actually, I didn't recognize Ezra right off, but I happened to step on one of the drawings and while I was freeing it from my shoe I spotted his style. Crouching, I studied the sleeping man's dirty, bewhiskered face.

"Ezra?" I poked his shoulder through a hole in the shirt.

"All my own work." He sat up suddenly, like a jumping jack who'd had his string yanked. "Unlike some so-called street artists who pass off cheesy Taiwan prints as their— Oh, the shame of it all!" He recognized me and brought one stained hand up to strike his breast.

"What's been happening to you, Ezra?"

"Incredible, isn't it?" He got to his feet, his joints making odd creaking noises. "When last we met, on your earlier trip to the Apple just six scant months ago, I—"

"It was only four months ago," I corrected.

"Ah," he sighed. "My fall from grace has been even more meteoric than I realized. Then I was the boy wonder of the advertising world, head art director of the vast and prestigious Madison Avenue advertising firm of Shestack & Bensink. Now I—"

"You weren't exactly a boy wonder, Ezra," I reminded him. "In fact, nobody can be a boy wonder at thirty-seven."

"Your long years as a West Coast account-exec have hardened your—" He paused, noticing that I'd been cautiously sniffing the air. "Save your snoz, you won't smell any booze on my breath. It wasn't liquor brought me to this, nor drugs either."

"What then?"

He wiped his nose on his wrist. "Love."

"Not again?"

"What does that heartless remark mean?"

"When I first met you, out in L.A. nine years ago, you'd followed a girl out there. That chubby redhead who was doing *I Married a Fat Girl* and—"

"Aw, that wasn't love." He hit his narrow chest again. "*This* is love."

"How long," I inquired, "have you been out of work?"

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"I'm working." Ezra pointed at the sprawl of his drawings with one foot. "Freelancing. An old and noble profession."

"Look, let me buy you a cup of coffee," I offered, glancing around. "How about that Barbecue Bob Restaurant across the—"

"No—nope," he said, his teeth grinding. "Not there. I'm not—especially fond of Bob." Eyes narrowed, he was staring across at the huge photo of Barbecue Bob that graced the front of this outlet of the nationwide fast-food chain. Bob, crisp chef's hat cocked over one eye, was grinning his famous plump grin, the one that appeared in all the Barbecue Bob print ads and on all the twenty-second, thirty-second, and minute television spots.

"What the hell does he have to do with—"

"He stole my true love."

"Barbecue Bob? The guy who hustles BQ Burgers on TV and touts his Orgy-Style Salad Bar with—"

"He's just an actor, you know." Ezra sank down to sit on a cathedral step. "There's not really a Barbecue Bob, only a conglomerate based in Texas someplace." He nodded toward the giant grinning face across the hazy avenue. "His real name is Barry Katchall. He's fifty-one years old and he's stolen Zinia from me."

I sat down next to him, pushing aside a drawing of the Empire State Building. "Not another model, Ezra? You're alluding to Zinia Fless, aren't you? The top advertising model in America?"

"Don't you think I have the depth of character to lose my heart to, say, Zinia Zankowitz, the noted Talmudic scholar? Or Zinia Buckler, the long-distance runner?"

"No, you don't. You're always getting tangled up with skinny, dippy models or actresses with brains the size of gumdrops," I told him. "Each encounter is worse than the last, Ezra, and leaves you in worse shape."

"I'll bounce back, never fear."

"What makes you think that?"

"I have talent," he replied. "I'm an artist. Unlike that fat lout Barry Katchall. I'll win Zinia away from—"

"Geeze, is that perspective way off, mister." A lean high-school boy had stopped to survey the drawings. He was pointing at one of the Brooklyn Bridge. "You futzed up your horizon line so the—"

"Take a hike, schmuck," suggested Ezra.

"The reason I mention it, I'm an artist myself. We're studying perspective at the New York High School of Comics and Graphic Arts this semest—"

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"I studied at the School of Kicking Wise Punks in the Slats." Ezra tarted to rise. "In a moment I'll demonstrate my award-winning echnique on—"

"Okay, okay," said the youth, moving away. "Personally, I ad-ocate solidarity among artists, but you obviously don't share that iew."

"A top art director at Shestack & Bensink," sighed Ezra, settling ack down on the step. "Now schoolboys criticize me."

"How come you left the agency?"

"After Barry Katchall stole Zinia, I—well, I found it difficult to oncentrate on my work. I wasn't sleeping nights, due to the heart-che and the fact I was watching his posh townhouse on Riverside Drive for a glimpse of Zinia as she came and went. One fine day, Shestack, in the morn, and Bensink, in the afternoon, found me lozing across my drawing board."

"You were sound asleep just now," I mentioned. "Are you still logging her?"

"Zinia spends a lot of time at his place and they use it as a base f operations when they depart for the lavish parties and glittering istros they frequent. I've found a spot in a nearby alleyway where can watch the rear entrance of Barry Katchall's townhouse. They se that entrance because he doesn't want the public to follow his omings and goings. I never approach them, but now and then I snap few photos with special night film. Here, I think I've got a few of er wearing a terrific cocktail dress that—"

"Ezra, I'm tied up the rest of this week," I said, standing up. "But et's have lunch next Monday. I won't be going back to the Coast for nother week at least."

"Where are you staying?"

I mentioned my hotel on the Park.

Ezra said, "Okay, I'll phone you there on Monday morning. Mean-ime, I'll think of a place we can go where you won't be embarrassed o be seen with me in my present shabby state."

"We can go any—"

"No, I see it in your eyes."

"Okay, call me Monday."

"I will," Ezra promised, crouching to rearrange his display of his vork.

We met, at Ezra's suggestion, at Chez Swann, a fairly expensive French restaurant on East Forty-ninth. I arrived first, and during

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the ten minutes I spent alone at our tiny table in a far corner I was somewhat uneasy. If Ezra came shuffling into Chez Swann looking as he had when I'd seen him sprawled on the steps of the cathedral last week, I doubted they'd seat him.

But it was a changed Ezra Gates who showed up for lunch—clean-shaven, hair trimmed, wearing a conservative business suit and a somber tie—with a briefcase and a moderately patronizing smile for the waiter who led him over to our table.

"I don't speak French," Ezra said, sitting, "but allow me to say *j'arrivée*."

"Arrived where?"

"On top of the world."

"You've come a long way since last week."

He chuckled. "You've grown increasingly cynical out there in lotusland." After glancing around at the other patrons, he placed his black briefcase on the crisp white tablecloth. Unzipping it, he slid a hand inside. "I've made a discovery which, in its way, rivals those of Thomas Alva Edison, Leonardo daVinci, and Dennis Wepman."

"Who's Wepman?"

"I think he's the guy who invented the paper clip." Ezra extracted a newspaper clipping and passed it across to me. "Or maybe it was the safety-pin."

The heading on the six-inch one-column item read TRIVIA EXPERT VANISHES and the subhead added FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED IN AUTHOR'S DISAPPEARANCE. Someone named Myron Zeppelin, age fifty-six, of Queens, hadn't been seen since late last week and a cousin of his had finally gone to the police. Zeppelin was the author of *Show Biz Triv, More Show Biz Triv*, and *Yet More Show Biz Triv*.

"What's Myron Zeppelin got to do with anything?" I set the clipping down next to my salad fork.

Reaching out, Ezra retrieved it and carefully returned it to the briefcase. "I know where he is."

"Somebody offering a reward?"

He laughed again. "Cousin's offering a hundred dollars for information."

"How's a hundred bucks going to put you on top of the world?"

"It won't, but seven hundred and fifty thousand will."

I asked, "Who's offering that?"

"Let me pep up my yarn with some visuals." Ezra's hand snaked back inside the briefcase. "This photo is cropped, for reasons that'll

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soon be obvious." He produced a nine-by-twelve glossy and passed it to me.

A grey-haired man, who looked unconscious or worse, was being carried along what was probably an alley. This was an enlargement, and grainy, and showed only the man and the hands of those who were lugging him. I noticed a large ring on the finger of one of the unseen pallbearers.

"This is Myron Zeppelin?" I asked.

"The late Myron Zeppelin, yes. Nice clear portrait of the fellow—one of several I was able to shoot a few evenings back."

Dropping the photo to the table, I said, "You saw somebody kill this guy, and instead of helping you took pictures?"

Laughing, Ezra said, "This is New York, old buddy, and there's a long and time-honored tradition of not getting mixed up in other people's troubles. But in this case, I didn't see old Myron getting snuffed out and shuffled off. I was merely on the spot when they were disposing of his earthly remains."

"This has something to do with Barbecue Bob," I said, "with this Barry Katchall who plays him."

"Ah, indeed it does." Ezra pointed at the hand with the ring. "Note the initials BB on that little dingus there. 'Tis the very same gaudy bauble Barry Katchall wears in all the commercials."

"You were a witness to this part, though? You actually saw Katchall toting the corpse out the back way of his townhouse?"

"I surely did." Ezra took back the photo.

"Then why haven't you told the cops?"

"You're not paying close enough attention. Remember my mention of seven hundred and fifty thousand?"

Frowning, I said, "Blackmail."

"I prefer to call it retribution," said Ezra. "One of the last times Zinia and I met she threw in my face that Barry Katchall had seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the bank, whereas I had at the time total assets in the vicinity of a thousand six hundred twenty-three."

"You ought to forget this," I advised. "Just turn your pictures over to the police."

"Nope," he said, shaking his head. "This is too good for the police. See, Shestack & Bensink are involved, too. Which cheers me up no end."

"That's right," I recalled, "your old agency handles the Barbecue Bob account."

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"How do you think Zinia met Barry Katchall in the first place? While up at S&B visiting me."

"Where does the agency come into this business with the dead—"

"That other pair of hands in the picture. They belong to Shestack."

"He was in on the killing, too?"

"No, no." Ezra rested both elbows on the table. "Here's what happened. I was at my post as usual the other night, waiting for Zinia to show. The minutes, then the hours dragged by. I was about ready to pack up when I spotted Myron Zeppelin, looking highly furtive skulking up to the back entry of Barry Katchall's townhouse. The hour was well after midnight."

"Why would he have been visiting Katchall?"

"Unlike some trivia experts, Myron Zeppelin did a good deal of first-hand research. Rumors have reached my ears before this that he was not above making a more direct profit from some of the unusual items he unearthed."

"He was a blackmailer, too?"

"He was a blackmailer, I'm an avenger," Ezra corrected. "Anyway, after Zeppelin had been inside the place for less than fifteen minutes, I heard what I thought were shots. Two of them."

"Didn't anybody in the neighborhood—"

"This, need I keep reminding you, is New York," Ezra said. "People don't pay attention to stuff like that. Anyway, minutes after that, a familiar limo comes barreling up and parks near the back door of the townhouse. Shestack himself alights. I, sensing the opportunity for some nice photos, ease ever closer. I get him going in and, much better even, I get him and a very disturbed-looking Barry Katchall carrying the body out and dumping it in the trunk of the limo."

"Why would Shestack be a party to—"

"Do you know what the Barbecue Bob account bills?"

"Must be about fifteen million anyway."

"It's twenty-two million," Ezra told me. "Shestack & Bensink get about twenty percent of that for handling the account. Now if Barry Katchall is arrested for murder, where does that leave S&B? Better yet, where does it leave the nearly five hundred restaurants? Fact is, the five hundredth is opening later this very week here in Manhattan. Where does that leave the Barbecue Bob chain of restaurants across this land of ours? Not to mention menus, billboards, television commercials, and a good many etceteras. That nitwit's face is on millions of pieces of advertising material. 'Barbecue Bob Murders

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rivia Expert!' That's not the kind of publicity any of them want. 's worth millions of bucks to keep Barry Katchall free."

"But he obviously did murder Zeppelin."

"Sure, that's exactly what he did," said Ezra, head nodding. "Barry atchall is a very high-strung, nervous, and emotional man, given) outbursts of temper. I learned that about him when I was still ith S&B and sat in on some tapings of the Barbecue Bob com- ıercials."

"The police," I repeated. "You have to take this to them, Ezra."

"Nope, I take it to Barry Katchall." He grinned. "Fact is, I've lready started my campaign."

"Campaign?"

"I'm going to wear him down a bit," he explained. "Work a sort teaser ad campaign on the oaf. Hints on the telephone, bits of the ıotos via the mails. By the time I offer to sell him the negatives r seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, he'll rush to the payoff ɔot."

"That'll make you a—"

"Happy and contented man," Ezra said. "Once I have money, large nounts of it, and Barry Katchall has nothing much, then I'll be ɔle to get Zinia back again. Although she's lovely and bright, she , I admit, mercenary."

"She earns quite a bit on her own."

"Okay, let's say I don't win her, which strikes me as highly un- kely," he said. "Even so, I'll get even with Barry Katchall for ealing her away. And that seven hundred fifty thousand won't be ıd, either."

"Listen, Ezra. I've heard a few things about this Katchall guy nce I've been in Manhat—"

"Who authorized you to poke your snoot in my—"

"Scuttlebutt. Since you mentioned he'd blighted your love life, I arted paying attention to what people—"

"Okay, so you had my best interests at heart."

"The point is, Barry Katchall has a reputation for being a highly ndictive man, very quick tempered," I said. "He acts on impulse ıd he can be violent when—"

"Don't I know that, old chum? Don't I have documentary proof of at very fact?" He patted the briefcase.

"He's the sort of guy, I hear, who'll cut off his nose to spite his ce."

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"Hey, there's a fresh new phrase. They pay you that outrageously high salary to come up with bright sayings like that?"

I said quietly, "He's liable to try something irrational if you goad him, Ezra. He won't care about saving his neck, only about fixing your wagon."

"Another sparkling new saying coined before my very ears." Ezra leaned back and chuckled. "Seriously, I appreciate your concern, but it ain't necessary. I can outfox that schlep with the greatest of ease."

For the next few days I didn't see or talk to Ezra. I know he tried to get in touch with me, but I was tied up in endless meetings with the NoKo people. In an attempt to improve the new beverage's taste, they'd modified the basic formula. This version, when testmarketed in Yonkers, caused some unanticipated side effects. A mild euphoria was the most frequent effect, but there'd also been reports of visions, hallucinations, and, in a few instances, out-of-body experiences. While a majority of the NoKo executives wanted to downplay the incidents, a few argued that this would make a good basis for a campaign. The arguments pro and con took all of my waking hours and quite a few of those when I should've been sleeping.

Meanwhile, Ezra pressed on with his campaign. Huddled in his sparsely furnished apartment in the West Eighties, he fashioned threatening letters that blended striking typography with snippets of the incriminating photographs of Barbecue Bob and the ad exective hauling off the deceased blackmailer. He also made provocative calls to Katchall's unlisted number.

While slouched in his real leather lounging chair, a remnant of better days, he'd monitor all the shows he knew ran Barbecue Bob commercials.

When Katchall was beaming plumply and inviting ("C'mon to my place, folks. Gorge yourself on my Gargantua Burgers and my Bob-Chokin' Sack-o-Fries. Help yourself to free shrimp, lobster tails, and pigs' feet. Stuff crisp salad into your maw, guzzle beer and wine. All for the amazingly low low price of just—"), Ezra would phone the actor.

"Yes?" Katchall sounded ever more nervous each time he answered.

"This is the voice of your conscience again, old chum. Repent. Murder will out!"

"Listen, you. Who the hell are—"

Ezra hung up.

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The mailed threats followed a similar pattern. Above and between tastefully cropped photos of Myron Zeppelin's funeral procession would be such slogans as *The Wages of Sin Is . . .* and *Murder Will Out!*

Ezra kept this up for several days, gradually introducing hints that the pictures might be for sale into his graphics and visuals.

As I understand it, he intended to give Katchall a large shock at the gala opening of the five hundredth Barbecue Bob Restaurant on Madison in the East Fifties. Then he'd send the request for the $750,000.

After that, there'd be just one more phone call to set up a safe place for the exchange of money and negatives.

It happened that I had an hour between client meetings on the evening of the opening of the restaurant. With not enough time to go out for dinner, I slipped into a deserted screening room in our Lexington Avenue offices and sent out for a sandwich. While I was eating, I turned on one of the room's television sets.

Most of the local news shows were offering live coverage of the Barbecue Bob festivities and I flipped to one of the stations just as their report came on.

"I see a lot of celebrities in this ravenous crowd," the handsome newsman was saying, "all gathered here to celebrate a fast-food triumph of— Hey, strolling in now is that jovial gentleman known as Barbecue Bob!"

Katchall's chef's hat drooped and his smile looked as though it were pinned in place as he made his way into the bright chrome-and-leatherette restaurant. Following close behind was the stunning red-haired Zinia Fless, wearing a very spare dress. She was smiling at the crowd gathered in the restaurant but seemed somewhat preoccupied.

Then I spotted Ezra. He was modestly disguised with a wispy false moustache and dark glasses. He wore an orange windbreaker over a T-shirt. The jacket was zipped up nearly to his chin. Later I learned that Ezra had silkscreened the shirt himself, using the old equipment he had in his shabby apartment. It was an excellent job.

His assumption was that neither Katchall nor Zinia would recognize him while he made his move and then vanished into the crowd. And even if one of them did recognize him, he intended to lie low someplace until he made his request for the money. His scenario was simple. He'd catch Barbecue Bob's attention, swiftly unzip his

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coat, and flash him a glimpse of what was emblazoned on his chest. It was a photo of Myron Zeppelin's body being carted down the alley.

Ezra had positioned himself so that Katchall could see him clearly but not one of the news cameras could. About a minute of exposure would suffice. Then Ezra would zip up, sneak off, and slip out a side door of the brand-new restaurant. Katchall, pushed to the edge, would now be willing to pay anything to save himself.

The first part went just fine.

"Hey, Bob!" piped Ezra in a false voice. "Look at this, Bob!" He yanked the jacket open, just as he'd done when he practiced at home, and thrust out his narrow chest.

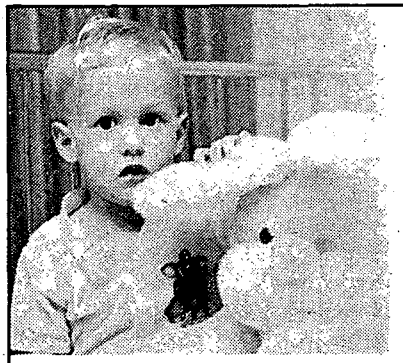
Katchall blinked, his mouth dropping open. Then a nasty scowl touched his plump face. "Okay, buddy, you think you've got me, huh?" he roared. "Well, we're going down together!"

Ezra hesitated, jacket halfway zipped up again. He hadn't been expecting this.

"I confess! I killed Myron Zeppelin!" announced Katchall. "That's right—me, Barbecue Bob! I murdered the guy!" Shaking with anger and fury, he pointed now at Ezra. "And there's the sneaking little twerp who knows all about it and has been trying to blackmail me!"

"Gee," murmured Ezra, "you're cutting off your nose to spite your face."

He tried to get out of there, but the crowd wouldn't let him.



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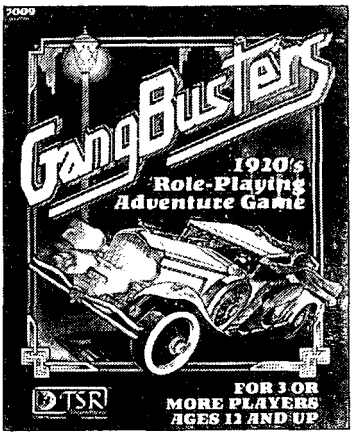

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a distinguished reprint by

GEORGES SIMENON

In a tribute to Georges Simenon on publication of his 200th book, Time *(March 14, 1969) said: "Neither Franglais nor Esperanto, the words 'maigret' and 'simenon' are nevertheless working their way into many of the world's vocabularies. Properly, a maigret is a detective story whose hero is a Parisian police inspector by that name, but so many maigrets have been published that the word is now used to describe mystery stories in general. In a stricter sense, a simenon is any novel except a maigret by Maigret's progenitor, Belgian-born Georges Simenon."*

In 1973, when Georges Simenon turned seventy, he announced his retirement from writing fiction because he was suffering from menieres disease, a vicious condition of the inner ear that upsets the sense of equilibrium, and he said, "One can write these novels only if one is in perfect health. They are not the kind of writing that is done in tranquility, in long hand, coining beautiful phrases."

But, happily, Maigret stories and novels are available for reprint. The following was first published in the U.S. in the June 1968 issue of EQMM . . .

INSPECTOR MAIGRET INVESTIGATES

by GEORGES SIMENON

Anyone dropping in at Marina's would no doubt have been completely taken in. Lucien, the *patron,* in a thick fawn sweater which made him look shorter and broader, was fussing about with

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his bottles behind the bar, decanting, recorking, meticulously changing the washer on the tap. And if he was surly, that could be put down to the early hour and the weather.

It was a grey morning and colder than usual, a morning that might bring snow, a morning to linger in bed. It was just nine o'clock, and the Rue Pigalle was not very lively.

The chance customer would have wondered who that large gentleman was, sitting there in a thick overcoat and smoking his pipe, with his back against the stove, nursing a drink in his hand. He would certainly not have thought of Chief Inspector Maigret of Police Headquarters.

On the floor, dusting the table legs, he might have noticed a Breton servant girl, Julie, with a scared look, her face covered with freckles and her clothes in rags.

In the Rue Pigalle restaurants, business rarely starts early. The clearing up had not been done. Dirty glasses were still standing about and through the open door into the kitchen could be seen the *patronne*, Marina herself, looking more bedraggled and lopsided than her servant girl.

It was all rather peaceful and familiar. Two men were still sitting at the back table, but they didn't look so bad, although they were unshaven and their suits were creased as if they had been up all night.

In fact, the casual customer would have seen nothing there but a small restaurant like any other, a restaurant with a regular clientele. Not very clean, admittedly, but not a bad place on a chilly morning.

He would, no doubt, have changed his mind if he had seen Maigret, suddenly noticing on the coat-stand a camel's-hair coat belonging to one of the customers, advance on it, put his hand in the pockets, and draw out, without any sign of surprise, a compact American rubber truncheon. Even more so if he had heard the Inspector remark cheerfully, "Hey, Christiani—is that still my one?"

Half an hour earlier, as he was arriving at the Quai des Orfèvres, Maigret had been called to the telephone by someone who insisted on speaking to him personally. The caller was obviously trying to disguise his voice.

"Is that the Inspector himself? Well, then, there was quite a to-do last night at Marina's. If you took a little walk that way you'd perhaps meet your friend Christiani. And it might occur to you to

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ask him for news of Martino—you know, the youngster from Antibes whose brother's just been shipped off to Guiana?"

Five minutes later, Maigret had found out from the exchange that the telephone call had come from a tobacconist's in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. A quarter of an hour after, he got out of a taxi at the corner of Rue Pigalle where, at that time, the gutters were heaped high with rubbish.

Maigret, who still knew nothing, would have sworn it was a serious matter—probably very serious, for informers like that rarely made up their stories.

The proof he had immediately, as he was walking slowly up the street. Almost opposite Marina's, and wedged surprisingly between the nightclubs, he spotted a small bar like those in Auvergne. In this bar, on the lookout close to the window, the Inspector recognized two men, from Nice and Pepito, who were not usually to be met with so early, especially in such a place.

The next moment he was pushing open the door of the restaurant on the other side of the street. At the back he caught sight of Christiani in the company of a young recruit, René Lecœur, who was called the Bank Clerk because he had worked in a bank at Marseilles.

In this kind of affair it is better not to be surprised by anything. Maigret tipped his hat to them all, just like any old regular coming in for a quick one. "How goes it, Lucien?"

That didn't prevent him noting that the cloth the *patron* held in his hands was trembling, or that the maid, straightening up suddenly, bumped her head on the table.

"Busy last night? Give me a coffee and a small calvados." Then, going into the kitchen, "How are you, Marina? I see someone broke your mirror for you over the bar."

He had noticed immediately that a mirror had been shattered by a revolver shot.

"That was done long ago," Lucien explained hurriedly. "Some fellow I didn't know. He'd just bought a gun and didn't know it was loaded."

After that it had been slow going. Maigret had been there for more than a quarter of an hour and not more than twenty remarks had been exchanged. While the maid went on with her work and Lucien stayed at the bar and Marina busied herself in the kitchen, the Inspector smoked his pipe, drank his calvados, went over from

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time to time to glance across at the bistro opposite, and walked back to the stove.

He knew the place like the back of his hand. Lucien, after having been in some trouble in Marseilles, had turned over a new leaf and opened up this little Montmartre restaurant, which he ran with his wife. The clientele was drawn mainly from former pals of his—gangsters, certainly, but most of them had mended their ways and become almost respectable.

Such was the case with Christiani, who ten years before, on being arrested, had not hesitated to cosh Maigret and who now owned two brothels in Paris and another at Barcelonnette.

It was much the same with the men across the street, especially the Niçois who owned two brothels, like Christiani, but unfortunately was in competition with him.

The Niçois was from the Marseilles gang, as they said in the trade, while Christiani was boss of the Corsicans.

"Tell me, has your little friend over the way been there long?"

"I don't bother about people like that," Christiani retorted scornfully.

"Maybe not. But he—he seems to me to be bothering about you. And, you know, if I didn't know you better I'd think it was his presence in the little bistro that's preventing you from leaving."

A pause. A mouthful of calvados.

"Yes. I'd figure it out this way. Last night, for one reason or another, something bad must have happened. And since then the Niçois and Pepito have been waiting for you outside so that you've been obliged to sleep sitting up, the pair of you." While speaking, he had approached the Bank Clerk and was now patting the creases in his jacket.

"Only, I wonder what could have happened, seeing that everyone knows Lucien doesn't like trouble and you yourself no longer dabble in this sort of thing. By the way, Martino's brother, who embarked from the Ile de Ré yesterday, sends his regards."

All very friendly. Good-humored, too. All the same, Christiani had started, and the Bank Clerk jumped to his feet. Taking advantage of this, Maigret patted his pockets and drew out a powerful flick knife. "Dangerous stuff, sonny. Shouldn't go round with toys like that. And you, Christiani, haven't you anything for me in your pocket?"

Christiani shrugged, took out a Smith and Wesson revolver, and handed it over to the Inspector.

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"Well! One bullet's missing. No doubt the one that broke the mirror. What really surprises me is that you haven't replaced the bullet and you haven't bothered to clean the barrel."

He slipped knife, truncheon, and revolver into the pocket of his overcoat and, without seeming to, proceeded to search every corner, even opening the refrigerator and the telephone booth. But, above all, his mind was hard at work. He was trying to understand. He built up hypotheses, and rejected them, one after the other.

"You know the Niçois told Martino that someone squealed on his brother? At least, so I've heard. If I let you go, it's so that you can avoid him, for he could bear you a grudge and he has a habit of being armed."

"What are you getting at?" grumbled Christiani, who appeared to be keeping as calm as Maigret.

"Nothing. I'd like to see Martino. I don't know why, but I'd be interested to see him."

Meanwhile, he had made certain that nobody, alive or dead, was hidden in the restaurant or in either the kitchen or in Lucien and Marina's bedroom, which opened off it.

At half past nine a delivery man brought in a case of *apéritifs*, and then, almost immediately after, a huge yellow moving van from the firm of Duchemin drew up in front of the building, and left again a little later.

"Marina, give me a slice of that homemade sausage of yours."

Then, suddenly, Maigret's brows furrowed, for out of the bedroom there emerged a new character, who was as surprised as the Inspector.

"Where have *you* come from?"

"I—I was lying down."

It was Fred, an associate of Christiani's in certain of his businesses. And he was lying, for Maigret had checked that the bedroom was empty.

"From what I can see," the Inspector grumbled, "you are all *so* attached to this place that you won't leave it. Give me *your* gun, too."

Fred hesitated, then handed over his revolver, another Smith and Wesson, fully loaded. "You'll give it back to me?"

"Maybe. That's going to depend on what Martino tells me. I'm expecting him any minute now. I told him to meet me here."

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He was watching their faces and saw René Lecœur grow pale and empty his glass.

One more attempt. He had at all costs to hit on it, and Maigret did the moment he caught sight of a heavy truck passing in the street outside.

"Take the receiver off," he ordered Christiani. He didn't want to go into the booth himself—from there he couldn't keep an eye on his flock.

"Get me Police Headquarters. Ask for Lucas . . . You've got him? Hand me the receiver."

Luckily the cord was long enough.

"Is that you, Lucas? You're to phone immediately to Duchemin, the moving people. You must trace a van of theirs that has just delivered or picked up something on Rue Pigalle. Understand? See what it is. Quick as you can. I'll stay here, yes."

Then, turning toward the kitchen, "What about that sausage, Marina?"

"Here you are, Inspector. Here you are."

"I don't think these gentlemen want any. If I'm not very much mistaken, they aren't feeling hungry."

At ten past eleven everyone was still in his place, including the Niçois and his companion in the bar opposite.

At eleven minutes past eleven Lucas jumped out of a taxi in great excitement, pushed open the door, and signaled to Maigret that he had something important to tell him.

"You can speak in front of these gentlemen—they're friends."

"I was able to catch the van at Boulevard Rochechouart. They picked up a trunk. They were telephoned for from here—a tenant on the third floor, Monsieur Bécheval. A huge trunk, or rather a chest, to be sent by train to Quimper."

"You let it go, I hope?" Maigret said jokingly.

"I had it opened. There was a body inside—Martino, the brother of—"

"I know. Go on."

"Dr. Paul was at home and he was able to come immediately. I have the bullet, which was still in the wound."

Maigret toyed with it casually and murmured, as if to himself, "Browning, 6.35. You see how this is turning out. These gentlemen who spent the night here, have only Smith and Wessons."

There was no way of foreseeing what he was about to do. Even at

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that moment no casual customer coming in would have sensed anything dramatic. Lucien was still straining himself to keep busy behind the bar.

"Would you like to know what I think? Keep it between ourselves, eh? Last night Martino, who had been drinking too much, made up his mind it was because of Christiani that his brother had been packed off to Guiana. He came back to pay him out, but as it turned out he was so much on edge that he met with an accident."

Even Lucas wondered what his chief was getting at. Christiani lit a cigarette and blew out the smoke with assumed nonchalance.

"Only, the Niçois and Pepito were waiting out in the street. They didn't dare come in, but waited for the others at the door instead.

"Do you see now? That's why our friends here slept sitting up while the Niçois did sentry duty outside and then, at first light, took up his position at the bar. The biggest problem was this blessed corpse, which couldn't just be left on Lucien's hands. What would you have done, Christiani? You're a clever man."

Christiani shrugged disdainfully.

"Answer me, Lucien—what is this Bécheval from the third floor?"

"A helpless old man."

"Just as I thought. Someone went up there in the early morning and told him to keep his mouth shut. Before the household awoke they carried the corpse upstairs, going by the back way, and locked it up in one of the old man's chests. Then they telephoned to Duchemin.

"Lucas, go and ask on the third floor if that isn't right. I'm sure they'll come out with a description of our friend Fred here, who took on the job."

"What does that prove?" Fred growled.

"Certainly not that it was you who bumped him off. Marina! Give them some sausage, after all. I'm going to bring them to Headquarters and it might take me quite a time to deal with them."

Still no sign of tragedy—as was proved when a cashier came in with a bill and completed his business with Lucien without noticing anything.

"You've still got nothing to say to me, Christiani?"

"Nothing."

"And you, Bank Clerk? I must say, this is the first time I've found you mixed up in a serious affair."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," the youngster said in a strained voice.

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"Then there's nothing to do but wait for Lucas."

They waited. And across the street the others were still waiting, too. And the street got busier as the sky cleared a little and the day brightened.

"Bad luck, Lucien, that this should have happened at your place. You must never let your mirror get broken—it's bad luck."

Lucas came back, announcing, "Just as you said. I found the old man gagged. He gave me a description of Fred, but there was someone else last night, but he didn't see him. They jumped on him while he was still asleep."

"That's fine! Phone for a taxi. Wait. Phone Headquarters as well and ask them to send someone to watch those fellows opposite so that they don't start something."

And scratching his head, Maigret looked at his trio of beauties and sighed. "By then perhaps we'll know which of you did the shooting."

Maigret, like a man with all the time in the world and nothing to do with it, picked one of the tables and spread out on it a real display, placing Christiani's truncheon beside his revolver and Fred's, then putting Lecœur's knife a little distance away.

"Now, don't get worked up about what I'm going to say to you, son," he threw at Lecœur, who looked as if he was about to faint. "This is your first job, but it probably won't be your last. That revolver there, you see, is definitely Christiani's—he's been too long in the game to play around with a little Browning like the one that killed Martino. Fred, too, is an old hand, who prefers serious weapons. When the fighting broke out, Christiani fired, but somebody must have knocked his arm because all he hit was the mirror. Then you, with your little Browning—"

"I haven't got a Browning!" the Bank Clerk managed to bring out.

"Precisely! *It's just because you haven't got one that it must have been you who fired.* Fred kept his gun, because he knew it would prove his innocence. Christiani didn't even clean his, to prove that he fired only one bullet, which didn't hit anybody. They both know what they're about, and they both stuck to the rules. While you—you had to get rid of your revolver since it would have proved you're the murderer. Where did you put it?"

"I didn't kill anyone!"

"I'm asking you where you put it."

"Ask Christiani."

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"It's too late to put on an act."

"You won't find a Browning."

Maigret looked at him pityingly and murmured, tight-lipped, "You fool!"

The more so as Martino was not out to get him, and, if he had really fired the shot, it was only to prove to the others that he had the nerve to do so.

When Lucas returned, Maigret said to him in an undertone, "Look everywhere, especially on the roof. They wouldn't have been stupid enough to hide the gun here at Lucien's, or in the old man's place. Oh, yes—at the top of the stairs there's a skylight to the roof."

He led away his troop, while two or three suspiciously innocent-looking strollers kept watch on the bistro opposite.

Christiani, in his camel's-hair coat, looked like a respectable citizen who was being taken away by mistake and would shortly be released with apologies. Fred swaggered. The Bank Clerk tensed every nerve in his body.

It was *the* classic case. Maigret had always claimed that, but for chance, fifty percent of criminals would escape punishment and, but for informers, the other fifty percent would remain free.

This gave the impression of being a witticism, especially when he rolled it out in his fine gruff voice. All the same, an informer had played a part in it, and then chance had led him to notice the yellow Duchemin moving van. However, that still left a good fraction of professional skill and knowledge of people, and even what is called flair, to play their part, too.

At three in the afternoon the Browning was found on the roof, where it had, in fact, been thrown out through the skylight.

At half past three the Bank Clerk broke down and confessed, and Christiani, after giving the address of an eminent lawyer, said, "This will get me six months!"

Maigret, without looking at him, said with a sigh, "And that truncheon of yours only cost *me* two teeth."

"Q"

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He fights the voice back into the far recesses of his mind, frightened by the thoughts. He doesn't like the voice, but it comes to him more and more, stronger each day. It no longer goes away when he tells it to. It lingers in his memory like an aftertaste . . .

"Oatmeal" is not only Dori MacDonald's first published fiction, it is the first story she ever submitted anywhere. Reading it, you will realize this is not a matter of beginner's luck, but of talent in a beginner. Ms. MacDonald was born in Chicago in December 1961, raised in Long Beach, California, and now resides in Massachusetts, where she feels a completely "acclimated Yankee." She is black, has a three-year-old daughter, Mercy, works as a computer operator for Cablevision of Boston, and attends college at night, studying for a degree in engineering. We publish this exceptionally deft first story in the hope that somehow she will continue to find time to write . . .

OATMEAL

by DORI MacDONALD

He is oatmeal.

He listens to the voice inside his head. It tells him there's a hatchet in the garage behind the cans of old turpentine and the broken bicycle pump and that it will feel warm and comfortable in his hands. The voice is dark and warm and smells faintly of fresh blood, coppery and red. He fights the voice back into the far recesses of his mind, frightened by the thoughts. He doesn't like the voice, but it comes to him more and more, stronger each day. It no longer goes away when he tells it to. It lingers in his memory like an aftertaste.

His family doesn't look up as he enters the kitchen. They think him below attention, little more than any other fixture in the house.

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He knows this. He is oatmeal. He sits at his customary place at the table and surveys the scenes of domestic life.

His youngest son is trying deliberately to give him a headache. The boy has his spoon in his hand, tapping his cereal bowl, his glass of orange juice, the table top, tap tap tap tapping donk thunk without stop. Every now and then he looks up at his father, daring him to do something about the noise, knowing he won't despite the growing headache, knowing too that even if he does try his efforts will be useless. The older two boys are bickering over some little girl in one or the other's class—eleven and twelve years old and already fighting over a woman.

He is struck for the hundredth time by the fact that not one of the boys looks like him. Neither do they look like each other. That relieves him for some reason. The boys are much too surly, much too impudent for him to handle. It gives him a slight amount of relief to think that perhaps these monsters are not of his doing. The boys think he is ineffective, know he is ineffective, never speak to him without disgust or disdain in their young voices, and he isn't very fond of them, either. He looks forward to the time when they are eighteen years old and he can toss them out of his house. Unless . . .

The voice tells him the hatchet is still there.

He puts the voice aside.

He is oatmeal.

His wife serves him the same breakfast she has served him for the past fifteen years. She gives him his flatware service, the same service he has used as long as he can remember, knowing he prefers it, refuses to eat from any other set. Any change in his daily routine would throw him into a state of confusion. "How did you sleep, dear?" she asks.

"Very well." He picks up his paper and turns to the business section. It is all by rote, even the morning conversation. "And yourself?"

"Oh, I had the most difficult time getting to sleep," she whines. "And then it wasn't even a good sleep. I'll have to make an appointment with Dr. Griffen today. Not that it will do any good. He tells me there's nothing wrong with me, but my head hurts so . . ."

And on.

And on.

And on.

Without end.

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He wishes his wife would shut up. He will not tell her to do so, but he wishes it all the same.

Every morning, the same complaints, the same problems repeated so often they have become a litany. I'm so bored, I'm so tired, I get no gratitude, I have to make an appointment with Dr. Griffen, the psychiatrist-who-can-walk-on-water, why don't you ever spend any time with me any more? I'm your wife and the mother of your children, why don't you appreciate me after I've given you the best years of my life, even gave up a promising career in the city to marry you? If you made more money and stood up to your boss once in a while we could go on more trips and leave the boys with my mother. I swear before God you're so damn *spineless!*

He sighs and turns the pages, inwardly pleased that his stocks haven't collapsed during the night.

The three boys look at him with open amusement. George and Edward and Charles—GeorgeandEdwardandCharles. He can't tell them apart any more. Except that Edward is the one with the spoon, that much he knows. Tap tap taptaptaptap. Without end. He reaches over and takes the spoon from him. Edward barely hides a smirk as he, in turn, takes the spoon from the brother closest to him, GeorgeorCharles. GeorgeorCharles punches CharlesorGeorge in the head. He slaps the boy. GeorgeorCharles yelps, CharlesorGeorge glares at his father. "Why are you always picking on him?" he demands. "You're always picking on him."

"He just hit you," he explains weakly.

"It was between us," CharlesorGeorge mumbles.

"Boys," his wife whines, "show your father some respect."

CharlesandGeorgeandEdward exchange glances and smile in a way he doesn't like. They know that respect is earned, and he has done nothing to deserve their respect.

The boys fight among themselves constantly, but there is sort of a camaraderie between them. If anyone should pick a fight with one of them, the other two instantly join in, making the fight three to one. They dislike intruders into their private little world, especially if that intruder is him.

He is oatmeal, and they dislike oatmeal.

At exactly 7:43, just the same as any other working morning, he kisses his wife on the cheek and leaves the house. In his car, his eyes fall on the cans of turpentine and the broken bicycle pump, and he hears the dark, squishy voice reminding him what is propped up behind them. He pushes the voice back and begins his drive to work.

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His radio is turned to the easy-listening station, the closest to rock he will get. His sons listen to ugly, somehow frightening noise played by drug-crazed lunatics with names like Def Leppard and Van Halen and Judas Priest. He fears that one day his sons will grow up and play in bands like that. All three of them have guitars.

On his own radio, Neil Diamond is singing something soothing.

Louder music intrudes on his ears. He looks up at the red light, wanting it to change. It refuses to change, at least not as quickly as he would like. He looks over at the other car. Bright-red, something fast and sleek and foreign. A handsome young man with a moustache and muscles bulging in his arms and dark glasses sits behind the wheel. Beside him is a pretty young woman with wild hair and a cigarette. She leans over the stick shift, hooks one manicured hand behind his head, and kisses him deeply. She is not wearing anything under her T-shirt. She is obviously chilly.

Tramp, he thinks—but for a fleeting instant he wishes he were the man with the moustache and that the sportscar and the beautiful lady with no bra were his.

But only for a moment. He is oatmeal, and his head hurts.

He pulls into the parking lot behind the company. He knows he is an important man because he has his own parking space with his name on it. He carefully eases the car into the space, is certain everything is turned off, takes his briefcase in his hand, and heads toward the building.

He looks very important.

The receptionist glances up as he passes by her desk, but there is no smile for him or even a second glance. She doesn't miss a beat with her typing and her brief look reminds him sharply that importance is more than a personalized parking space.

His secretary sits at her desk outside his office, legs crossed, skirt high on her thighs, polishing her nails. Her mouth forms a perfect O as she blows the polish dry. "Good morning," she purrs. She looks up at him with her chin down, making promises with her eyes.

Another tramp, he thinks, but he likes the way her legs look. She throws herself at him daily, hourly, but he is a family man and would never consider adultery, even though he and his wife have not slept in the same room for ten years, ever since the birth of the youngest boy. "Miss Davis," he says as sharply as he can, as sharply as he dares. "The office is not the place for your manicure."

"Yes, sir," she says, and she pouts. He knows she will do it again, and brush her hair at her desk, and call her mother long distance,

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but she is a very good secretary and he is a sensible man. It would be a complete waste of time and money to fire her and train another secretary in her place.

She gives him his telephone messages, listing them one by one as if he can't read them. She tells him what he's going to do during the course of his day. Contracts to sign, clients to see, projects to approve. "Oh, and you have a twelve-thirty meeting with Mr. Harris and Mr. Kimberley, that representative from the Chiswick Company. It has something to do with your handling of their account."

He thinks he sees a sneer on her face somewhere, but he isn't sure.

The mention of Mr. Harris's name knots his stomach. He is reminded of his childhood, when he and his sister watched a snake swallow a frog. He is the frog, Mr. Harris is the snake. Every time he has a meeting with Mr. Harris he feels he is being swallowed alive, with the very breath being sucked from his lungs. He briefly wonders if his sister ever feels that way. They have not spoken in several years, ever since she married that black man. His sister is a successful attorney, her husband is a surgeon in a major hospital. They live in a good neighborhood and have two beautiful daughters. He doesn't see that, though. Only that his sister is married to a black man and therefore deserves his displeasure.

He puts his sister out of his mind. His sister is truly alive, and therefore not oatmeal.

Mr. Harris's office is large and imposing, carefully designed to put a person on the defensive and make him feel totally ill at ease. He sits on the edge of one of the great chairs facing the great desk, which is totally bare but for a pen holder with two black pens. The top of the desk is a polished mirror. The representative of the Chiswick Company, Mr. Kimberley, sits beside him, smoking a foul-smelling cigar. Mr. Harris, the snake himself, sits behind the desk, also smoking a cigar. The office smells terrible. Both Mr. Harris and Mr. Kimberley stare at him, studying him, trying to make him uncomfortable.

"We're disappointed in you," Mr. Harris says. He smiles at him while he says it. "Mr. Kimberley and I have been looking over your presentation and, quite frankly, we don't think it's up to your former standards."

Mr. Kimberley also smiles at him, a patronizing, somehow sinister smile. He looks exactly like a weasel. "I've discussed it with the

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president of the Chiswick Company, and with Mr. Harris here, and we've decided it would be in our best interests if you were taken off our campaign. We realize you are a very good advertising director—one of the best, if I may say so myself—but Chiswick is pouring millions into this campaign and we can't afford to have anything but *the* best work for our money."

He is having trouble breathing. The air is being sucked from his lungs. "Does that mean you're firing me?"

"Firing you?" Mr. Harris booms. He tries to make his voice soothing and reassuring, but it only serves to increase his anxiety. "We're just replacing you on this particular project. We're putting Miles in charge."

He feels vomit rise in his throat. Miles. That son of a bitch. He wants to stand up, to shout, I trained Miles personally! I taught Miles everything he knows! Miles thinks with his balls! But he sits there meekly, rubbing his hands together feebly.

"You've been reassigned to the Quartermain account. You've done very well with them in the past and they've requested you personally to handle their new campaign." Mr. Harris smiles again. The snake swallows the frog and rests in the sun.

He hears himself apologizing for his imperfections, thanking them for their grandness and generosity. He wonders how he can talk with all the air gone from his lungs.

He makes his way back to his office. On the way he runs into the last person in the world he wants to see: Miles. Miles is a handsome bastard, well over six feet tall and blonde and muscled and very, very charming. All the secretaries in the company are in love with Miles, and many (or so it is rumored) have been privileged to make love to Miles.

"I'm sorry about you getting pushed off the Chiswick account," Miles says. He's sincere in his pity, which makes it all the worse.

"Oh, no," he says. "It will be a great opportunity for you. Good luck."

Miles thanks him and smiles at a temporary file clerk. The temporary file clerk blushes.

He passes Miss Davis, applying a tenth coat of polish to her already red nails. He wants to shout at her, but he can't. All her work is done and he has given her nothing else to do. "Hold all my calls," he tells her, and he locks the door to his office.

His head is pounding. He can feel the blood in his temples beating

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against his head, hurting him, hurting so badly, making his scalp a tight, uncomfortable helmet. His eyes throb, they burn. He grinds his fists into them, trying to force the pain away.

The voice realizes his defenses are down. It talks to him.

He is too weak to resist it.

It tells him dark things, unclean things, fills his head with thoughts of blood and slime and warm, familiar wood under his hands. How would you like to be free? it asks him. How would you like to be rid of all of them?

He sees CharlesandEdwardandGeorge, their insolent little faces sneering at him, all to the tune of a spoon tap tap tapping against the table.

He sees his wife, once a beautiful, blithe creature, now nothing more than a nagging, whining hypochondriac.

He sees Mr. Harris and Mr. Kimberley, the snake and the weasel, and remembers how it feels to be verbally kicked in the crotch.

He sees Miles, that hedonistic backstabber, who probably instigated the whole Chiswick replacement affair.

He sees Miss Davis and thrills at the thought of a few hours of carnal pleasure with her, then feels blinding rage because he knows she is only teasing.

The voice talks to him, telling him there is a way out, a way to stop the headaches and be more than oatmeal, a way propped behind the cans of old turpentine and the broken bicycle pump, a way with a worn wooden handle and a sharp blade that hasn't gathered much rust during the winter.

The voice promises happiness. The voice promises inner peace. The voice promises darkness and silence and relief.

This time, he doesn't force it back.

He sits in the semidarkness of his office until it's time to go home and then gathers up his belongings and leaves. He doesn't forget to change the calendar or straighten his desk before he goes, nor does he forget to close his office door behind him.

"See you tomorrow," Miss Davis says—and she walks away from him, more than likely to Miles' car, rolling like the ocean. He enjoys the view.

"Yes, tomorrow," he hears himself saying, but his voice doesn't sound the same. It sounds of dark, slimy things. Miss Davis hesitates, then shakes her head and continues on her way.

His head pounds in traffic. It's all he can do to keep his attention

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on the road. He drives slower than usual, adding to the rush-hour madness and not caring. The closer to home he gets, the worse his head hurts.

I can't take much more of this! he screams, the scream inside his head. The little voice hears it and laughs.

He pulls into his garage, his headlights reflecting against the back wall. He turns the engine off and sits in his car with his head resting on the steering wheel.

He is oatmeal.

I am oatmeal.

Oatmeal. Bland, without color, without distinction. People recognize oatmeal for what it is and treat it as such, with no respect, with no consideration. When oatmeal dies, it dies as it lives, without a trace.

I can't take much more of this.

His eyeballs pound.

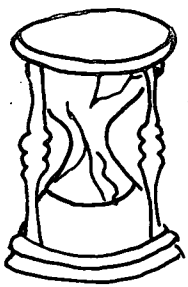
He hears voices from the outside, the sound of his sons who really aren't his sons dropping their bicycles on the front porch and pounding into the house. He hears his wife nagging at them to wipe their feet, don't they realize she slaves all day to make a good home for them?

I can't take much more of this.

I won't be oatmeal any longer.

He gets out of his car, leaving his briefcase inside. After staring at his house, now lit up and alive, he moves aside the cans of turpentine and the broken bicycle pump.

As promised, the wood feels good in his hands.



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Good news for sports and mystery fans alike. J. L. Pouvoir's "first story" in the Mid-December 1984 issue of EQMM turns out to have been the first in a series about Sweeney of The Baltimore Nocturne, *at sixty-two "the last of the gentlemen sportswriters." "The Death Triple" was set at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. "The Poisoned Polonais" is set at the French Open in Paris, where the tennis is first-rate. But Sweeney has come for more than sliced backhands. Having first encountered Paris with Eisenhower in 1944, he has come for chestnut trees and choucroute alsacienne and forty years of memories . . .*

THE POISONED POLONAIS

by J. L. POUVOIR

In Paris Sweeney maintained a precise ritual. Awake in his room at the Meurice by 8:00 o'clock, élevé by 8:30, crisply turned out in seersucker by 8:50, at table by 9:00. Breakfast of pain au chocolat, café au lait, and fraises Chantilly.

No Frenchman took strawberries and whipped cream in the morning, but then Sweeney was no Frenchman. At home in Maryland, he routinely devoured crab cakes and baked beans an hour after rising. Fraises Chantilly, by comparison, were a barely visible deviation.

Repast consumed, Sweeney gathered the newspapers—*Le Monde, Le Figaro*, and *L'Equipe*, the sporting daily—under an arm and set off by foot along the Rue de Rivoli toward the Place de la Concorde. By 10:00 he was aboard the métro, whirring toward La Motte-Picquet, changing for Michel-Ange Auteuil, climbing the steps, emerging next to the Bois de Boulogne, an easy walk from the Stade Roland Garros and the French Open.

The Open had become an annual caprice for Sweeney, a springtime

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indulgence that lured him out of Baltimore and kept him in Paris for two weeks while May blended into June. The tennis was first-rate, but Sweeney came for more than sliced backhands. He came for chestnut trees and choucroute alsacienne and forty years of memories.

Sweeney encountered Paris first with Eisenhower in 1944 and he still marveled at how lovely the place looked sans Huns. He knew each arrondissement by heart, having walked them all by blackthorn stick.

Yet most of his time he passed beyond the Porte Molitor, where the French celebrated the sport they once dominated with their Four Musketeers—Borotra, Cochet, Lacoste, and Brugnon.

Tennis in Paris was tennis on terre battue, on beaten earth, the crushed limestone topped with brick dust that passed for a clay court. At the Open, they played on it from late morning until dusk, the men's matches continuing for hours.

Players paused after each game to whack the sides of their shoes with their racquets and knock loose the clots of clay. After five sets of skidding and chopping and shuffling, everything from the calves downward was stained red, so players wore their shoes and socks into the shower.

As he strolled toward the stadium, Sweeney perused the results from the third day, scanning *L'Equipe* on the way. *L'Equipe* told him everything—today's schedule, yesterday's agonies and triumphs, grand scenes, and running subplots.

Passing the botanical gardens along Avenue de la Porte d'Auteuil, Sweeney glanced at the front-page photograph of the tournament favorite shouting at an anonymous Italian paparazzo with a noisy motor-drive—*McEnroe éclate en gagnant 6–3, 6–1, 6–3*, the headline advised—and hunted for the box showing the order of play and the court assignments.

Clerc and Pecci at center court, followed by Connors and Guenthardt and Mandlikova and Mascarin. Tomorrow, Sweeney told himself, we observe from the stadium. Today we prowl the field courts.

There was room and time to loaf there, sampling a dozen minutes here, Hanika vs. Teeguarden, then moving on to Arias vs. Ocleppo, Gottfried vs. Leach, Purcell vs. Urpi.

You saw the future on the field courts, Sweeney knew. He'd first noticed Lendl there in 1979, nineteen years old and all in black, shredding Ashe as the breeze ruffled the shrubbery.

The morning promised Sweeney a dozen matches to taste. Start

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with Panatta the Younger and Barazzutti. Then Wilander vs. Alexander. Stop at the ice-cream stand for a chocolate-covered bar flavored with Grand Marnier. Then Fibak vs. Krickstein, Maleeva vs. Vermaak, Jordan vs. Ruzici.

A bit of lunch at the restaurant inside the press area. Veal in fennel sauce with asparagus, a carafe of vin rouge and a tarte aux pommes. Then five more matches, at least.

Few, if any, would make Sweeney's account for his afternoon newspaper—assuming he bothered to file at all. The *Nocturne*'s interest in the early proceedings was limited. Besides, the matches on the field courts were mere hors d'oeuvres. The plat du jour was served inside the stadium, where thousands of Parisians in white caps rolled up their shirtsleeves and guzzled bottles of Perrier, Orangina, and peppermint Get.

Sweeney would write about all of that during the second week, when the tournament had progressed to the quarter finals. What he wanted now was mood and nuance. He decided to look for it on a terrace five hundred meters away, where a Venezuelan named Vasquez was dueling a Pole named Pyciak.

Pyciak he found intriguing. He was a socialist who thrived on grass courts, pounding flat serves that skipped and kicked up chalk. Pyciak had won Wimbledon a year earlier, then survived a fortnight of New York mugginess, LaGuardia jet screech, and American hardcourts to take the U.S. Open.

He'd gone Down Under to claim the Australian title on a Melbourne greensward and now he was here, looking to complete the Grand Slam, all four major championships in a row.

Slender chance of that, Sweeney guessed. Clay was hardly Pyciak's surface. The pace was slow—five sets of thwocking forehands from baseline to baseline exhausted his patience. After two hours of this, Pyciak would abandon logic for instinct and go to net, eager to punch home volleys and win points. French and Spanish rivals lobbed balls over his head, hissing with topspin. Pyciak never won a thing on clay.

For his first match here, the organizers put him on center court as a courtesy and Pyciak had barely escaped, coming from two sets down to expunge a Monégasque. Le tout Paris shrugged. Today he was consigned to the terraces, where maybe a hundred bystanders bore witness. Nobody expected him to return.

Sweeney settled into a shaded seat and watched Pyciak win a set from Vasquez (6–4), lose one (7–5), and win another (6–1). Then

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Pyciak toweled off, drained three bottles of Evian water, and quickly went up 2–0 in the fourth. Well in hand, Sweeney concluded, and slipped away to observe Hanika and Teeguarden.

Six hours later, with the supper hour drawing near and his notebook stuffed with fresh and compelling detail, Sweeney sought the métro and the Meurice. He arrived to find the telephone ringing.

"Ici Sweeney."

"Ah, mon ami, ici LePage. Comment ça va, mon vieux?"

"Pas mal, old buddy," Sweeney replied. "Not bad at all. Lovely to hear from you, as always. I presume I can be of aid in some small way."

LePage sighed. "Something incroyable has happened at Roland Garros. Pyciak, the polonais, is dead. Poisoned, we believe. You were at the matches today, non?"

"Oui."

"Then we must talk. May we take our supper together, you and I?"

"Bien sûr, old buddy,"

"Au Gourmet de l'Ile? At eight o'clock?"

"Perfect. I'll be there."

LePage and Sweeney dined together annually at the Gourmet. The spécialité de maison was andouillettes, a grilled pork concoction served with beans. In Mississippi, they were called chitterlings. In Paris they were andouillettes and those who relished them had formed an association for their preservation and digestion. Sweeney represented the Baltimore chapter.

He'd known LePage since the war, when Sweeney had been a lieutenant on Ike's staff, planning for the Normandy invasion and beyond. LePage had been an aide to DeGaulle-in-exile, preparing for the day when le General returned to personally haul down every swastika above a Paris rooftop.

LePage had learned his French from sa mère Annette—Sweeney acquired his from the War Department. When they met over dinner, they spoke in something of a franglais, French and English all mixed together like a bouillabaisse. They held a number of things in common—a taste for the grilled pork concoction, the works of Prokofiev and Mark Twain, and the science of deduction.

Sweeney had applied the science to afternoon journalism, LePage to the Sûreté, where he busied himself with an assortment of crimes

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and scandales. The latest was the unfortunate demise of Monsieur Pavel Pyciak, ranked No. 5 by the professional tennis computer.

Sweeney discovered LePage waiting for him at a table near the stairs, spooning country paté from a jar. "Looking mahvelous, Georges," Sweeney informed him. "As always."

LePage rose, kissed him on both cheeks, and returned to his paté, delighted but no less perplexed. "You saw Pyciak play his match?" he asked Sweeney.

"Until two-to-nothing in the fourth. At which point I digressed."

"The rest we know," LePage said. "Some of it, at least. Pyciak wins six to two. He proceeds to the vestiaire and steps into the shower to scrub the clay from his ankles. He complains of cramps in the stomach, mais c'est normale. A man stands in the sun for three, perhaps four hours, striking a thousand, perhaps two thousand tennis balls, he dehydrates himself, his muscles protest. Each day we see this. Then a player, one of the Germans, emerges from his shower to find Pyciak on the floor."

Sweeney grunted, carved a bite from an andouillette and took a long sip of Bordeaux. "And then?"

"For a time, the real cause of death is elusive. The doctors look for the usual results of exerting oneself to excess. Cardiovascular things, cerebral things. Then the autopsy is done. Poisoning. We are yet unsure of the type. We know only that it appears to work well."

"The method?"

"Ingestion. Food, drink . . ."

"And you suspect whom?"

"Our people believe perhaps the Polish secret police. The information is that Pyciak had thought to defect, perhaps in London next month, perhaps here. Who can know? It is possible that Pyciak might have waited until the summer tour began in your country, might have played in Boston and Washington and requested asylum, as Navratilova did several years ago."

"Certainly there must be other possibilities."

"Mon ami, there are always other possibilities. A betrayed lover. A disappointed gambler. A madman of incomplete description. At the moment, we prefer this one. It evokes Warsaw and trains arriving at dawn. Smoky coffeehouses with newspapers hanging from rods. Unexplainable women lingering over chilled vodka. And a trace of progressive socialism gone zinzin."

"Maigret would like it," Sweeney mused as a plate of cheese was placed before him. "It may even be the truth."

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"That is why I have called you," LePage concluded. "You will return to Roland Garros in the morning, n'est-ce pas?"

"Sans doute."

"You may well hear something there that will be of interest to us. Our theory is suitably complicated and romantic. But the Sûreté is willing to accept another theory. Comme toujours."

"A votre service," Sweeney said, fishing a hundred-franc note from a well worn billfold and handing it up to the waiter. "As always."

They parted outside by a bread shop on the Rue St. Louis en l'Ile. "Au revoir, old buddy," Sweeney said. "As you know, my deadlines here are casual. I should be able to come up with something."

He turned onto the Quai d'Orleans, crossed the Seine by the Pont St. Louis, and entered the triangular little park behind Notre-Dame to think.

The Polish secret police, he decided, doesn't make sense. There was no reason for Pyciak to defect. He was twenty-six, at the peak of his game. The Polish tennis federation let him keep most of the million or so he made each year, which Pyciak had spent on the condo at Amelia Island, the townhouses in Manhattan, and the chalet at Klosters. Half a dozen sleek automobiles, from a Rolls Silver Shadow to a Maserati, awaited his hand at the ignition. Pyciak dressed, dined, and traveled as he pleased.

In return, Sweeney knew, all he needed do was avoid speaking publicly on delicate subjects like unwelcome Soviet troops, general strikes, and the benefits of unfettered trade unionism. And when Poland was putting its team together for the Davis Cup tournament, Pyciak was expected to devote a weekend every few months for the cause. Two singles matches and a doubles match. Play in Warsaw in late winter, in Rome after Wimbledon. If the team was extraordinarily lucky, they might make it to the semifinals and play in Prague, in Stockholm, in Atlanta.

In all, it was a small price to pay for as much bourgeois fruit as Pyciak could gobble. Poland already had that sort of deal with Fibak. Lendl and Czechoslovakia had come to an understanding several years earlier.

As far as Sweeney knew, nothing had changed between Pyciak and the socialist gentlemen back home. I doubt I'll learn much here, Sweeney concluded, and wandered down to the Cité station on the métro line.

He changed at Odeon and was out by the Bois in thirty minutes.

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It was almost midnight now and the only soul left in the Roland Garros press room was the man from the *San Diego Union*, transcribing notes for a relentless profile on Chip Hooper, the towering American.

He had not seen the end of the Pyciak-Vasquez match, he told Sweeney, but Collini had. Collini, though, had long since written, filed, and vanished—some Vietnamese place near the Pantheon, he thought. "He and Clerici left together."

"Obligated," Sweeney told him, peering at the work in progress. "Do they really care that much about Hooper in San Diego?"

The man from the *Union* smiled. "They will."

The Pantheon was easily reached. The same métro line that brought Sweeney to the Bois dropped him at Maubert-Mutualite on the Left Bank. A brisk but steep walk up the hill left him at the Rue Descartes near the restaurant window, through which he could see Arturo Collini, the tennis correspondent for *Il Giorno di Milano*, pouring an aromatic fish sauce over a mound of pork and vegetables.

"Ciao, caro!" Collini cried as Sweeney made his entrance. *"Buona sera!"*

"And to you, my friend. Always good to see you."

"You know my man Clerici?"

"Of course. I knew his father."

"So what brings you to Montparnasse at this hour?"

"Match detail," Sweeney said. "Did you see Pyciak play Vasquez today?"

"I see everything, my friend. I see Pyciak from the third set onward. He comes quickly to dominate. As the sun bears down more firmly, he removes the caps from several minor bottles of Evian water and exhausts them in one swallow. He returns to the baseline, wins two games more, goes to his chair, and exhausts several bottles more. A man of expansive thirst, this Pyciak. He takes the fourth set at the loss of two games."

"He's dead," Sweeney observed.

"Of course, my friend. He fails also to collect his million."

"Ah, yes. The Banque de Clichy."

"Exactly so. The tennis federation rewards Navratilova handsomely for putting together her Grand Slam. So the French, in an admirable display of Gaullist provincialism, offer the same to anyone who can do the same but complete it in Paris. Eight million francs, at the current exchange."

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"Unfortunate for Pyciak," Sweeney mused. "Convenient for the Banque."

Clerici, spearing a cluster of noodles, nodded. "And when is anything inconvenient for the bank?"

Sweeney grinned hugely. "Mahvelous, old buddy. Spoken like a true Lombard."

The next morning Sweeney descended into the press tribune at Roland Garros to seek out Judy Etienne, *L'Equipe*'s tennis correspondent nonpareil.

Lendl, wearing his cryptic Czech-border-guard expression, was detonating a Spaniard named Higueras on center court. An hour before noon, the sun was broiling the terre battue into a mini-Sahara. Typical Roland Garros weather, Sweeney muttered. August in May.

He found Etienne in the front row, taking notes in a tiny hand. *"Ah, Sweeney, mon vieux, c'est toi. Enchanté."*

"Lovely to see you, old girl. Mere formality for Lendl, I see."

"As predictable as the métro," Etienne replied, wincing. "And equally as exciting."

"Question for you, if you please. Do you know anyone at the Banque de Clichy?"

"Only those who are involved with the tennis. They are a sponsor here for many years. There are several officers who come and sit in a private box. One or two people in relations publiques. And one who works in sponsorship matters. He comes each morning to make sure that the advertising banners are properly placed. Pour le television. Loic Courteau could tell you more. You know him?"

"The tournament director? Since childhood. His, not mine." Sweeney stepped out into the aisle. "In your debt, old girl." He ambled out to the walkway and headed for the general offices.

He discovered Courteau at his desk, nursing a whisky and soda.

"This is not a morning habit, mon ami," he told Sweeney. "But after the events of yesterday . . ."

"The Sûreté still holding to their theory of the secret police?"

Courteau shrugged. "Do they have a choice?"

"Perhaps. Tell me, how many kinds of official badges do you have here?"

"Seven or eight. Press. Player. Tournament official. Honored guest. Employee. Concessions. Security. Each has different levels of access. An area that is open to one is forbidden to another."

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"But tournament officials—don't they have unlimited access?"

"Of course."

"And who is entitled to receive one?"

"My deputies. Members of the federations, the professional tennis council, members of the tournament board."

"And who is included on the board?"

"Who is not? Several former champions, functionaries for the federations, a socialist politician or two, the man from the Banque de Clichy . . ."

"Which man is that?"

"Jacques Fevrier—their liaison for all seasons. He prepares the sponsorship contract, delivers the payment, sees to the advertising."

"So he would have access everywhere?"

"Mais oui."

"Even the tournament room?"

"If he desired."

"A pleasure, Loic."

"This assists you?"

"Possibly. I'll know by this evening."

Back in the press area, Sweeney commandeered a telephone and a Paris directory and dialed a number on the Right Bank.

"Banque de Clichy. Bonjour."

"Monsieur Fevrier, s'il vous plaît."

"Il n'est pas ici aujourd'hui. Mal a gorge."

"Sore throat. Okay. Merci."

Sweeney riffled the pages and found a Jacques Fevrier on the Boulevard de l'Hopital, not far from the Place d'Italie. The métro, direction Mairie d'Ivry, brought him there in forty minutes.

Three attempts at the doorbell of No. 132 brought nobody but the concierge, who'd been scrubbing the staircase and was in an appropriate humor.

"Eh, monsieur?"

Sweeney summoned up his best Lafayette-we-are-here French. He was an old acquaintance of Monsieur Fevrier, in Paris for barely a week, and wished only to see him. When might the monsieur be at home?

The concierge did not know. She had seen the monsieur last evening, getting into a taxi and telling the driver "Gare de Lyon."

Why, Sweeney wondered, would the monsieur be going to the

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Riviera during the Open? He was a fanatic for tennis. This was well known.

Yes, the concierge nodded. And for the roulette wheel, aussi. You would find him often in Monte Carlo. The casino there was his summer domicile. And when they held the spring tournament there on clay, the monsieur would spend a week between the casino and the tennis. When the roulette ball falls as it should, he comes back in an Alfa Romeo. When it does not . . .

And it does not?

Not the last time. Or the time before that. The monsieur tells me that chance deserts him.

"Dommage," Sweeney clucked. "A shame. Tell Monsieur Fevrier that his American cousin was asking about him."

Outside, Sweeney slipped into a telephone booth and called LePage at the Sûreté. "Georges, old buddy. Ici Sweeney. I may just have your man. Have your border people at Menton check a Jacques Fevrier. Might be leaving Nice for Italy early this afternoon."

Sweeney was back at Roland Garros before one. Lendl had won and gone. In his place, Yannick Noah, the local god, was midway through his diurnal passion play. Sweeney glanced at the scoreboard, then at his watch. Only 8:00 A.M. in Baltimore. Ample time to make the deadline for the afternoon edition. He slipped a yellow legal pad from his battered leather portfolio and began the definitive account of the day's proceedings.

Paris—French police today arrested bank employee Jacques Fevrier at the Italian border and charged him with the murder of Polish tennis player Pavel Pyciak, who . . .

He was 600 words along when the telephone rang for him.

"Sweeney, mon ami. Our people have Fevrier in hand. He has confessed not only to the murder, but to embezzlement from the Banque de Clichy. Eight million francs, we believe. A thousand congratulations. Maigret could not have done as well. How do you?"

"By discarding your secret-police theory," Sweeney said. "As the Englishman says, it was elementary. Socialist millionaires don't usually defect. Navratilova is an exception. Fibak, Lendl, Kodes, and Nastase are the rule. It had to be someone else with some other motive. Collini made it come together for me. Once I remembered that Pyciak would have gotten that million-dollar windfall for completing the Slam, I began thinking along those lines.

"Who would have wanted to prevent him? A rival? Doubtful.

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Money sprouts everywhere on the tennis tour today. Even your marginal Hungarians win half a million a year. The bank, then? Didn't seem likely. A million dollars is small pommes de terre to them—I'm sure it came out of their promotional budget.

"But suppose the money wasn't in the budget any more. And suppose whoever lifted it began worrying about what would happen if Pyciak ever did win the tournament and claimed the bonus? He couldn't let that happen."

"But Fevrier?" LePage wondered. "You knew him?"

"No, but everyone else did. He'd been a fixture at Roland Garros for years. He had the official badge. He could have gone anywhere on the grounds and not an eyebrow would have been raised. He had access to the tournament room where the towels, the balls, the water are stored."

"But how could Fevrier have been certain he would not be discovered? People are coming in and out of that room without cease."

"He couldn't. But he could narrow the odds. Those Evian bottles have plastic tops. You could take a few home with you, doctor them with whatever pleased you, bring them back the next day, and slip them into the carrying tray. Each one is marked for a particular court. Fevrier knew where Pyciak was playing hours before the match. All he needed do was get into that room during the match, place enough doctored bottles onto the tray, and figure the odds would be with him. If it didn't work this time, well, Pyciak would have another match tomorrow. Sooner or later, the man and the bottle had to find each other."

"But couldn't he have poisoned Vasquez as well?"

"Not Vasquez. He always brings his own water. It's a fetish with him. Anybody who's followed tennis for a while knows that. Fevrier must have, too. It was ninety degrees out there yesterday and the match had gone to four sets. Pyciak had to be swilling water as though each swallow would be his last."

"Bien sûr. One was. But why did Fevrier need the money?"

"Gambling debts, I presume. Fevrier liked to spin the roulette wheel. Word was he hadn't been much good at it lately. He knew Pyciak never did much on a clay court and had to figure he was a good risk. So I gather he filched the bonus money, believing it wouldn't be missed and that his luck would turn eventually and he could pay it back. Happens he miscalculated. Pyciak seems to have acquired a peculiar feel for your terre battue."

"But how did you fix upon the Italian border?"

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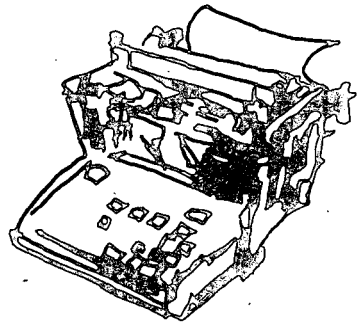
"Once I knew he'd gone to the Gare de Lyon," Sweeney said, "there wasn't much doubt. The Gare du Nord sends trains to the Low Countries. The Gare de l'Est is for Germany, the Gare d'Austerlitz for Spain. If you want to go to the Riviera, Monaco, or Italy, the Gare de Lyon is your ticket."

"And you knew about the Gare de Lyon . . ."

"From the concierge. Not many of them left, I'm sorry to see. There's no more instinctive bloodhound extant than the Parisian concierge. Sans doute, old buddy."



DETECTIVERSE

MURDER, UPDATED

by JAMES NEILL NORTHE

Unlike latter-day classical murders
Caused by design or by whim,
It wasn't the butler who did it—
Somebody murdered *him.*

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

A publishing phenomenon of the 1960s and early '70s was gothic fiction. Readers (largely female) seemed insatiable, authors (normally female bylines hid not a few male opportunists) leaped to produce, and publishers (largely paperback) issued books in torrents. Gothics might have been called house/mansion/castle fiction: the archetypical cover showed a woman, long hair streaming, rushing from a dark dwelling of death. This fiction faded away as quickly and completely as it had come—disappeared into Regency romances, contemporary romances, and occult narratives.

However, traces can still be found, as for example in the foreboding house in *Stillwatch* (Simon & Schuster, $14.95) by Mary Higgins Clark. Pat Traymore, TV journalist, is lured to Washington to do a special on a congresswoman who might be a breath away from the Vice Presidency. Against adyice, Pat moves into the house of her childhood, of dim but returning memories, the house where her father is thought to have killed her mother, and then himself, nearly dispatching Pat in the process. Skeletons also rattle in the congresswoman's past, and if you don't trip on an overlarge coincidence, you'll enjoy the blending of two intriguing story lines.

S. F. X. Dean's professorial sleuth Neil Kelly is still in England for his fourth case, *It Can't Be My Grave* (Walker, $12.95). Kelly has written a book on the poet John Donne which has become, unaccountably, a commercial success. While in London to attend a launch of the British edition, he's drawn into the compulsions of a tycoon to prove that an ancestress of his wrote a play sometimes attributed to one W. Shakespeare. All very innocent, except that mountains of money, threatened bastions, and repressed passions lead to murder, with Kelly in the thick of it. As usual, this is stylish of phrase and language and strong of character; I could only wish that the denouement had been delivered with more force.

Striving with Gods (Doubleday, $11.95) is the first of Jo Bannister's four novels to cross the Atlantic, and it's a gem of vigorous characterization and action plotting. Clio Rees retired from medicine to write moderately successful mysteries. Now her good friend Luke Shaw dies in a homosexual suicide pact. So say the police. Clio is devastated, outraged, enraged. And one thing she's sure of: it's murder, and she'll prove it if necessary. But if Luke was in trouble which took him to an obscure English town, why didn't he tell Clio, to whom he told everything? Then Clio finds out why . . . An excellent piece of work; I want to see more of Jo Bannister.

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Robert Barnard now turns his skill at witty dissection to the British Upper Crust in *Corpse in a Gilded Cage* (Scribners, $12.95). This one takes a bit long to establish itself but in the end is a succulent triumph of comic casting and situations.

Chetton Hall, a vast and historic pile squatting on lands stretching from horizon to horizon, is the ancestral home of the Earls of Clapham. Unexpected death has brought a Clapham ironmonger to the earldom, and he and his wife can't wait to get out of the place and back home. Meanwhile, their children and in-laws—lusting and scheming after a piece of the pie—gather to celebrate the new Earl's sixtieth birthday.

And to celebrate murder, it would seem. The eldest child, an unaccomplished housebreaker doing a stretch at Her Majesty's pleasure, turns up to take over, to observe that death has been statistically overpresent of late, and to figure out whodunit.

Some of the most solidly enjoyable private-eye novels available in recent years have flowed from the typewriter of Michael Z. Lewin, and *Out of Season* (Morrow, $12.95) is very much up to that fine standard.

Here Albert Samson returns to help the wife of a banker prove that she was born so she can get a passport. Seems simple enough, but there's sufficient complexity and menace on this backtrail to produce a corpse. And although Samson normally has no cases at a time, here he has two: a retired chap, living in solitary and computer-assisted splendor atop an Indianapolis apartment building, wants a man investigated. And that's a curious business, too. Good thing Albert has help—a researcher at a newspaper, some semi-friendly cops, even the fellow who lets Samson live rent-free in return for watching (inadequately, as it develops) his stockpile of plate glass.

Jack S. Scott's Inspector Alf Rosher, you may recall, fell from grace some novels back because of an ill-judged mammarian grope. But his career if not his personal life has been resurrected, and now he looks into the murder of a privileged lad in *All the Pretty People* (St. Martin's, $14.95).

Privileged Teddy Poddy might have been, but he was a tad psychotic and his body contained cocaine when found. Blowing his nose with a noise that shakes strong men, baring his uniformly brown molars in what he fancies is a smile, adopting a hideous accent which his tin ear says matches that of pretty people, Rosher looks for evil—and finds it. Slangy, richly comic work this is.

The ninth of Stuart M. Kaminsky's tales of Hollywood film nostalgia and private eye Toby Peters is *The Fala Factor* (St. Martin's, $11.95).

It's May 1942 and middle-aged Peters is broke, his car's tires are balder than he is, and his office landlord, a sadistic dentist, is threatened by dental inspectors.

What else can go wrong? Well, a killer could turn a gun on Toby and command him to sing. This

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particular contretemps goes back a week, when Eleanor Roosevelt popped into Toby's office with a request that he retrieve FDR's kidnaped Scottie, Fala. Strange what will crawl out from under rocks when one is merely hunting a little dog. Amusing diversion.

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a *NEW* short story by

IAN STUART

Quite suddenly, the wind dropped, and after a few minutes it began to rain. Isolated heavy spots at first, soon it was torrential. Lightning forked over the sea and thunder rumbled. The wind returned, too—not as strong as it had been, but wild enough and wailing round the cottage. Alex watched the storm coming closer until there was no pause between one vicious flicker of lightning and its accompanying crash of thunder. The bangs were almost deafening, shocking as physical blows . . .

LORNA'S PEOPLE

by IAN STUART

Thirty years ago few tourists came to Anaig. There was no car ferry and the only means of getting there was the Macbraynes' boat from Oban to Mull, a bus across the island, then a forty-minute trip in an open motorboat. Even in summer, there were days when the sea was too rough for the boat to make the crossing and would-be passengers were stranded on Mull.

When you arrived, there was little enough to see—just a bare island five miles long with a few scattered crofts and the village, a score of cottages straggling along the shore staring out across the sea to Canada. The only road was little more than a track running round the coast, pitching and plunging across the slopes and twisting past rocky outcrops. It didn't matter—there were only half a dozen cars, one lorry, and two or three tractors on Anaig. How they had got there, heaven only knew.

On the west coast the *machair* extended a couple of hundred yards to where the Atlantic rolled in. In summer the tussocky grass was a mass of wild flowers, the only sounds the incessant murmur of the

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surf, the anguished cries of the gulls, and the bleating of sheep on the hillside.

It suited me well. Indeed, if it had been otherwise I would never have gone there, for its isolation was what drew me to the island in the first place.

I owed it to Barbara Lewis. For a year or so, when we were both students at St. Andrews, we had been pretty close—then, quite amicably, we drifted apart. We still saw each other occasionally in Edinburgh, where I was lecturing in sociology at the University and Barbara was an architect working for a practice in the West End. All the same, it was by chance we met at a party when I was thinking about taking a year's sabbatical to write a book about the social structures of the remoter regions of Britain.

"You should go to Anaig," Barbara said when I told her.

"Anaig?" If the name rang a bell, it was the faintest of chimes.

"It's about as remote as you can get in Britain. One of the Western Isle. Plenty of sheep, a handful of crofts, and the sea."

"How do you know so much about it?" I asked.

"Lorna lives there." Barbara saw my blank expression. "Lorna MacNeil. Don't you remember? She shared the flat my last year at St. Andrews."

I had departed by then, but I remembered Barbara's mentioning her. I fetched two more drinks and asked her, "You say your friend Lorna lives on Anaig?"

"Yes, she's the school teacher there. She'd probably be able to find somewhere for you to stay. It'd be just the place for your research, Alex."

We said no more about it then, but over the next few weeks the idea took root and I felt myself thinking more and more about Anaig. I looked up the island in all the reference books I could find, without learning much about it except that it was dominated by the twin peaks of Beinn Dearg and Beinn Bheag, both just over two thousand feet, the population was a little more than a hundred, and there were a Roman Catholic church and a post office but, apparently, no hotel. Finally I rang up Barbara and invited her to lunch.

"Could you give me Lorna MacNeil's address?" I asked her when the waitress had taken our order.

"You're going?" She sounded pleased in the way one usually is when somebody has fallen in with one's plans for them. "There's a wee cottage beside her house you can have if you want it."

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"How do you know?" I inquired suspiciously.

"I wrote and asked her after Fiona's party," Barbara said, smiling complacently. "I was sure you'd decide to go."

My immediate reaction was to say I wouldn't, but then I looked out of the restaurant window at the sleet sweeping along Princes Street and the castle almost lost in the grey mist and decided the prospect of a few weeks on an unspoilt island was rather appealing.

"You'll like Lorna," Barbara said confidently.

That evening I wrote to Miss MacNeil and a week later I received a reply, businesslike and friendly, saying I could rent her cottage for as long as I liked.

"It's nothing more than a but and ben," her letter concluded, "but it's quite snug."

"There's one thing," Barbara warned me when I rang to thank her for her help. "Don't ask her about her family."

"Oh?"

"Her parents are both dead. She has a brother, Alan. He's in prison in England somewhere."

I was mildly startled. The girls I knew didn't have brothers in prison. "What did he do?"

"I don't know all of it. There was a fight and a man was nearly killed. Lorna says it was an accident. She was awfully upset—she's very fond of Alan."

"I'll remember," I promised.

Four months later, on a fine Monday morning, I caught a train from Waverley Station en route to Anaig.

Sitting amidships in Angus MacDonald's boat, I watched the island come closer. It was a glorious summer day and the clear blue sky was reflected in the sea, while the sun, dappling the gentle swell, made the surface of the water glitter. My first impression was that Anaig too was shining, the cottages looked so white and clean against the fresh green hillside. Beyond them I could see the tiny waterfalls on the slopes of Beinn Dearg and the sun glinting on streaks of white rock.

Lorna MacNeil was waiting at the tiny jetty to meet me. Beyond her cryptic "You'll like Lorna," Barbara had told me very little about her, and I suppose I had imagined a dowdy, worthy young woman, probably wearing spectacles. Certainly nothing had prepared me for this lovely girl. She was slim, neither tall nor short, with dark-brown hair, but it was her eyes I noticed before anything else. They

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were large and grey and they regarded me with a directness that later I sometimes found a little disconcerting. She held out her hand, smiling.

"You must be Alex." Her voice was soft, with the islands lilt in it.

"Yes, I am," I said. "And you're Lorna MacNeil."

My spirits high, I swung my rucksack onto my back and together we walked up the road through the village, past the fishermen's nets, a telephone box, and a row of coal heaps, each marked by a stake. Lorna saw me looking at them curiously.

"The boat brings our coal twice a year," she explained. "It's dumped there and we collect it when we need it."

I think it was those heaps of coal more than anything else which impressed on me that life here was very different from what I was used to in Edinburgh.

We passed a wooden kirk, its weather-stained boards almost bare of paint, a tiny school, and a general store with a sign over the window, ANAIG POST OFFICE. The cottages were mostly small, with slate roofs. Some of them had corrugated-iron porches. As we walked, gulls shrieked overhead and cows grazed on the *machair*. Up on the slopes behind the houses, I could see men cutting hay. And everywhere there was the scent of seaweed.

The cottage was at the end of the village, single-storied and with a low-pitched roof of green corrugated-iron so that it seemed to squat on the turf. Inside, the two rooms were furnished simply but comfortably enough. I had brought several books with me, but there were enough there to keep me occupied for a year.

"I warned you it wasn't much," Lorna said. "I hope you'll be comfortable. Maybe when you've settled in you'd like to come over for a cup of tea."

I thanked her and said I would and she left me to unpack.

Her house was sixty or seventy yards farther along the road. It was the largest building in the village and stood well back, sheltered on three sides by tall pines. That evening's was the first of many visits I paid to it. Soon I no longer waited for an answer to my knock but walked straight in; people on Anaig had no secrets. Or so, in my innocence, I thought.

Lorna devoted a lot of her spare time to the village children and local affairs, but we saw a good deal of each other. She intrigued me. There was a strange blend of delicacy and toughness in her

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makeup, but the toughness was a woman's with nothing masculine about it.

As for my work, it made slow progress. The people were friendly, but few of them spoke English and I hadn't the Gaelic, with the result that I found it hard to get to know many of them. Even with those I did, apart from Lorna and Father Mackenzie, I was conscious of a barrier between us. For all their surface friendliness, they were reserved by nature. The village, which when I arrived had seemed open and welcoming, came to seem closed and inward-looking. Perhaps on Anaig introspection was inevitable: look out and there was nothing but the sea and sky. Mere existence was hard enough.

Father Mackenzie was a lean, philosophical man of about sixty, devoted to his flock, humorous, and not above enjoying a dram or two.

"Thankfully, Mother Church does no' require us to resist *all* the temptations of the flesh," he remarked once, his eyes twinkling.

He made no secret of his affection for Lorna. "She's a fine girl," he told me one day when we were sitting in his comfortable, shabby room, talking. "You know her father was factor here?"

"No," I confessed.

"Aye, he was so. That was his house she lives in. When he died, the laird decided there was no call for a factor for Anaig just, so he let her go on living there. Her mother died years ago, you ken, and Alan was away to England."

"What's Alan like?" I asked.

Lorna had never mentioned her brother and I had heeded Barbara's warning.

Father Mackenzie hesitated. "Ach, he's weel enough. But he's cursed with a wicked temper like his father." He said no more and I didn't pursue the subject.

During those weeks I came to understand what scratching a living really meant, even in summer when the work was much less arduous than it must have been in winter, when the winds screamed across the island scourging everything in their path, man as well as rock and bog. That month there were days when the clouds, massed grey and lowering, drove across the sky and rain whipped my cheeks.

I knew Lorna had reservations about my work, and one evening, rather rashly, I said something about my lack of progress.

"What did you expect?" she asked.

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"What do you mean?" By this time we knew each other well enough to speak freely.

"You look on the people here as specimens to be studied and written up. To you they're just material. They aren't fools and they know."

I was on the point of denying the accusation, but there was sufficient truth in it to hurt.

"It's not like that," I protested.

"Isn't it? They're decent people, Alex—and you've no right to patronize them."

"I don't patronize them," I retorted, stung. "I respect them and I'm interested in their way of life, that's all. It's my job."

"I'm sorry," Lorna muttered. "I shouldn't have said that. It's just that I want you to be—"

She stopped.

"What?" I asked gently, my anger gone as swiftly as it had come.

"Nothing."

I was surprised to see she was blushing, but she turned away, and when she spoke again it was about something trivial.

That episode, brief though it was, seemed to me to mark a new stage in our relationship. It was as though we had both seen that, while we needed to be honest with each other, honesty held its dangers. And I knew I was in love with her.

As time passed, I came to know some of the islanders better, but there was one with whom I never so much as exchanged a greeting, although I knew he had worked on coasters and spoke English better than most people on Anaig. Ruairidh Macleod was in his early thirties, a squat, dark fellow with deep-set eyes and a habitually sullen expression. Nearly every small community has its odd man out, and Ruairidh was Anaig's.

He had returned to the island a few months before—I gathered after getting into trouble over some woman—and ever since, he had shown more than a passing interest in Lorna, though I couldn't imagine her wanting anything to do with him. He was a surly brute and she was fastidious in almost everything. I even wondered in my darker moments if she had encouraged my visits to the house in the hope they would deter him.

The other islanders disliked him. Especially the women. They were kindly, tolerant people, but there was a black streak of violence in Ruairidh that set him apart. Normally he kept pretty much to

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himself, but when he got a few drams inside him people gave him a wide berth and I was glad our paths didn't cross.

One afternoon, five weeks after my arrival, I went down to the shop to buy some groceries. Highlands stores are capable of springing surprises with the range of their stock and that day it was melons. Why Angus MacDonald should stock them when most of his customers found it hard enough to buy the basic necessities of life I had no idea, but there they were, six fine yellow fruit at the end of the counter. On an impulse I bought two, one for myself and one for Lorna, without pausing to consider she might not like melons.

Carrying them home, I went round to the back of her house and came face to face with a tall, good-looking man about my own age with almost black hair and dark, brooding eyes. Clearly, he had just come out by the kitchen door and he looked as surprised to see me as I was him so that for a second or two we stood staring at each other. I was pretty sure he wasn't an islander, for by then I knew almost everybody on Anaig by sight, and visitors from the outside world were few and far between.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

He went on eyeing me with the same brooding stare. "Miss MacNeil is my cousin. I'm staying with her for a while."

There was no reason I was prepared to admit to myself for my being angry, but nevertheless I was. Partly it was resentment at the way he was sizing me up, but there was more to it than that.

"She didn't tell me you were coming," I said.

"And why should she?" He spoke coolly, but it seemed to me there was something wary in his manner.

I realized I was still clutching the melons. "I saw these in the shop," I told him. "I brought one for Lorna."

He said nothing, and I walked past him into the kitchen. Lorna wasn't home yet and I put one of the melons down on the table. When I went outside again, he hadn't moved and I walked across to the cottage conscious of his eyes following me.

I didn't go to the house that evening. It was childish, I dare say, but I was hurt Lorna hadn't told me her cousin was coming to stay and, though my resentment soon faded, it left me uneasy. The feeling was too vague to be foreboding—rather it was a premonition that things would never again be quite the same between us. There had been something proprietorial in the newcomer's manner when he

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spoke of her and the knowledge that I was jealous didn't make me feel any better.

Just before nine there was a tap on the door. When I went to answer it, Lorna was standing there.

"You've met Neil," she said quietly.

I nodded. "Yes."

"I hadn't seen him for a long time—I didn't know he was coming." There was a defensive note in her voice and she was avoiding my eyes. "He won't be here long."

"So he said."

"Oh. Thank you for the melon, it was lovely."

I imagined them eating it, sharing the gift I had intended for Lorna alone.

"That's okay," I said. But it wasn't.

We were less at ease with each other then than we had ever been, and when after a few seconds more she said, "I'll away home then," I didn't try to persuade her to stay.

The next day I stayed indoors and worked on my notes. It was high time I got down to some work, but that wasn't my real motive—I didn't want to run into Lorna and her cousin.

The day after, a letter came from Barbara. It was a surprise—we hadn't written to each other since she left St. Andrews—but once I had read the first page about the weather in Edinburgh and mutual friends and her hope that I was enjoying myself, I soon found why she had written: Lorna's brother had escaped from prison and was on the run. The police had issued a warning that he was dangerous and shouldn't be approached.

"Poor Lorna," Barbara finished. "Let's hope he doesn't try to get in touch with her."

I picked up the envelope and looked at the postmark. It was dated three days before.

She was too late, I thought. He was already here.

All that day I debated with myself what I should do. The nearest outpost of the law was a solitary constable on the next island. The cottage didn't possess a telephone and the exchange was an old-fashioned manual affair in the post office. I didn't fancy calling Mrs. MacDonald from the box by the jetty and asking her to put me through to the police. After all, I told my conscience, I had no proof the man staying at the house was Alan MacNeil. Lorna had called him Neil.

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My main concern was for Lorna. She might be sheltering an escaped convict, with all the risk to her if it were ever discovered. At the same time, I knew now, in my own mind at least, that he wasn't her cousin and she really hadn't known he was coming. The relief of knowing she hadn't deceived me about that lifted my spirits.

Daily papers reached Anaig a day late—longer if the sea was too rough for Angus MacDonald to fetch them. I had seen only two or three since I arrived and I didn't know whether the wanted man's photograph had been published. Not that it would make much difference. Alan MacNeil had kept to the house and I was probably the only person on the island who had seen him.

How had he come? He would hardly have called for Angus to fetch him. MacDonald would have recognized him immediately. No; he must have bought or, more likely, stolen a boat on Mull.

Curiosity overcoming any slight urge to work, I changed into heavy boots, stuffed my pockets with apples and chocolate biscuits in case I was gone a long time, and set out, keeping the cottage between me and the house for as long as I could. It was a fresh morning with a gentle breeze off the sea and I walked fast, enjoying the exercise.

The north shore was rockier than the west or south, with steep cliffs that rose to forty or fifty feet in places. After half an hour I came to a small cove with a strip of sandy beach. Pulled up on the sand, well above high-water mark, was a bulky object covered with a tarpaulin.

No fisherman or crofter used that cove—it was about the most remote place on Anaig. I scrambled down the steep slope to the beach and lifted a corner of the tarpaulin. Under it was a small rowing boat fitted with an outboard motor. I let the sheet fall back into place, climbed the cliff again, and made my way home.

I couldn't make up my mind what I should do. I considered going to Father Mackenzie, but it would be unfair to put the responsibility on his shoulders. There wasn't even the excuse that I belonged to his Church. I tried to work, but I couldn't concentrate on anything, and eventually, late in the evening, I went out again.

It was some time before I returned, and when I did I was a good deal easier in my mind.

That state of affairs wasn't to last long.

Most evenings it had been light enough to read out of doors until at least 10:30, but tonight dark clouds were piling up menacingly

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over the sea. By the time I got back to the cottage just before ten, it was already nearly dark and the wind was beginning to howl across the *machair,* tearing at the pines so that they resembled flattened sails, their trunks the twisted masts.

I sat looking out of my window, watching the storm approach. That was how I saw the man at the door of Lorna's house. It was only a brief glimpse, then he was gone inside, but I had recognized the figure hunched against the elements.

Then, quite suddenly, the wind dropped, and after a few minutes it began to rain. Isolated heavy spots at first, soon it was torrential. Lightning forked over the sea and thunder rumbled. The wind returned too—not as strong as it had been, but wild enough and wailing round the cottage. I watched the storm coming closer until there was no pause between one vicious flicker of lightning and its accompanying crash of thunder. The bangs were almost deafening, shocking as physical blows.

It went on for a long time, but at last the storm passed, moving out over the sea towards Mull, leaving behind it an unnatural calm. I went to bed then, but I didn't sleep.

The next morning the sun was shining from a cloudless sky. The whole island seemed to shine brightly, fresh-washed, as it had done when I saw it first from Angus MacDonald's boat. Anaig was too bare for the storm to have left many signs of its passage, and apart from some large puddles outside the cottage it was almost as if it had never been.

After breakfast, I walked over the shoulder of Beinn Dearg to the little cove.

As I expected, the boat had gone.

I took a different way home, and a couple of hundred yards short of Lorna's house I spotted something on a ledge halfway down the cliff. At first I thought it was a pile of old clothes, then something about it struck me as wrong. I was sure it hadn't been there yesterday when I walked along the clifftop, and I began to work my way down the slope to the ledge, clinging to the wiry grass and scrabbling for footholds.

More than once I slipped and slid several feet before I could stop myself, but after a while I reached the pile. It was old clothes, true enough, and they were drenched from the storm, but when I stooped over them I stopped, horror-struck. Inside the clothes was all that was left of Ruairidh Macleod. He might have fallen down the cliff,

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but it wasn't that which had killed him. He was lying face-downwards and when I moved him I saw that the front of his guernsey was stained with blood. Ruairidh had been stabbed.

Leaving him there, I ran to Father Mackenzie's house. The priest was at home and I blurted out what I had found.

"You say Ruairidh was between Lorna's house and the wee cove on the north shore?" he asked when I had finished.

"Yes."

"Oh, aye, aye," he murmured, nodding as if to himself.

"The boat's gone."

"Boat, you say?" He regarded me with innocent eyes, and I saw then that he knew about Lorna's brother—perhaps had known all along. Probably he saw in my face that I knew, too.

"A man's body was washed up on Mull during the night," he said. "I'm verra much afraid it may be the man who was staying with Lorna. Puir man. There was a boat, too—a small boat with an outboard motor."

"That would be the one I saw," I said.

"Maybe, maybe. I will telephone the police, but I daresay they will not be making a great fuss aboot puir Ruairidh now."

Father Mackenzie was right—the police saw no point in making a major inquiry of what was all too clear. Alan MacNeil had come to the island to see his sister. Perhaps he hoped she would shelter him for a while or give him money for the next stage of his flight. She had sent him away and, leaving, he had encountered Ruairidh, who recognized him. There was a scuffle and somehow Ruairidh was stabbed, no one would ever know how. Now Alan, too, was dead.

I left Anaig soon afterwards. My last meeting with Lorna was embarrassing for us both, there was so much unspoken between us. And when it came to the point, she hadn't trusted me enough.

For I knew Alan MacNeil hadn't killed Ruairidh. It was Macleod I had seen at the door of Lorna's house just before the rain started that night. Alan had already gone. He would never have set out in his little boat once the storm was raging. In any case, I had seen him, a rucksack on his back, striding away in the direction of the cove at least three-quarters of an hour earlier. At the time I had been relieved he was going!

No, Lorna had killed Macleod. Knowing his reputation, I could guess what must have happened. People talk about moon madness. Perhaps the tension of the coming storm had disturbed him. Or he

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had lusted after Lorna too long and drunk too much whisky. Whatever it was, he must have behaved in such a way she had grabbed a knife to defend herself, stabbing him in the struggle when he tried to take it away from her. Then, half out of her mind with fear and guilt, she had gone through the storm to the village for help. She could never have dragged Ruairidh's body so far alone.

Father Mackenzie knew. Perhaps the whole village did, and they had closed in to keep their trouble and their shame to themselves. They were Lorna's people, and it was to them she turned rather than me. They had their code, and sometimes it was stronger than an alien law.

I never finished my survey. I couldn't write about what had happened that night, and without it no one would have really understood.

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There is nothing threatening, thought Smith, about a man with a baby carriage, even in a strange neighborhood . . .

THE INVISIBLE MAN

by MALCOLM McCLINTICK

They didn't notice you when you pushed a baby carriage along the street. Or if they did, they saw only a father out walking his baby.

A lone stranger in the neighborhood would, of course, be noticed. But not with a baby carriage. Nothing threatening about that.

"Good morning." A pink-cheeked housewife waved from her front porch, holding a bundle of blanket and baby.

"Good morning," Smith called, waving back. He pushed the baby carriage forward—not too slow, not too fast.

They trusted a man with a baby carriage.

A slight breeze, making the spring leaves rustle. The sidewalk was smooth and even, with only a small crack here and there. A good neighborhood, observed the man, with well kept lawns. From the porch, as he passed it, came the faint cries of the young woman's baby.

"You called about a burglary, ma'am?" The cop, in uniform, touched his visored cap and looked bored.

"Yes." It had been fifteen minutes already—why hadn't they come sooner? The woman felt anger, fought it. She was thirty, a housewife, in jeans and a flannel shirt, brown hair cut short, just back from the grocery half an hour ago to find her bathroom window broken open and her camera gone.

"Let's have a look around," said the cop, and walked through the house. "What's missing?"

"My camera, so far." She saw his glance and added: "A *good* camera. Thirty-five millimeter, SLR, with two extra lenses. You know, wide-angle and telephoto. The whole thing would be over four or

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five hundred dollars." She caught her breath. It didn't sound so much with the cop's skeptical eyes watching her. "Maybe more."

"Insured?"

"Certainly."

The cop hurried to the bathroom. "Forced entry," he said, and wrote in his notebook. "See anybody suspicious hanging around lately?"

"No. This is a quiet neighborhood. We don't have suspicious characters."

"Oh." He shrugged, checked the rest of the house, and prepared to leave. "Well, let us know if you find anything else missing."

She hesitated. "Aren't you even going to check for fingerprints?"

He blinked. "Ma'am, cases like this, residential break-ins, are hardly ever solved. Probably some kids—grabbed your camera and headed for a hock shop across town. We might turn it up someday in a bust, but probably not. I'm sorry." He turned toward the door. "File an insurance claim, ma'am. And get some locks for your windows."

He was gone.

So was her camera.

And her sense of security.

She went to the kitchen, trying not to cry, and made coffee with trembling fingers.

The sun was warm on Smith's face. A pretty, twentyish girl was approaching from half a block away, pushing a baby carriage and wearing cord slacks, tennies, and a windbreaker, her face framed in golden hair. He put a smile on his lips and eyes—he had a nice smile, a fatherly smile—and paused to calm his nerves, then pushed the carriage onward.

They met in the middle of the block. Her baby was about six months, red-faced, wrapped in a pink blanket. It gurgled and gibbered. The girl smiled, the breeze catching her blonde curls. "Great morning for it, isn't it?" she said.

"You bet." He beamed. "Just right. A little windy, though."

"Yes, I'm keeping her bundled up. Her name's Becky. What's yours?" She meant the baby.

"John." He saw her blue eyes go to his carriage. "He's had a cold, so I'm keeping him well covered."

"Good idea. Well, nice talking to you."

"You, too."

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They passed, smiling at each other. Smith heard her baby sigh, then laugh once, as the girl bent over and did something with its blanket. Then he pressed on, thinking how easy it was to fool them. She didn't even see me, he thought. I'm invisible. She saw a man with a baby, but she didn't see *me*.

Only a few more blocks.

"Sorry to bother you, ma'am."

"Yes?"

The cop had his window rolled down. The young woman looked into the marked patrol car.

"There's been a burglary in the neighborhood and I—"

"*This* neighborhood?"

"Yes, ma'am. And I was wondering if you'd noticed anybody strange or, you know, out of place. Anybody acting suspicious."

The young woman's baby began to cry. She began pushing the carriage forward and back. "To tell you the truth," she said, over the hum of a passing motorbike, "I haven't noticed a thing. Just an ordinary morning, people out with their babies, neighborhood deliveries. Who got burglarized?"

"Mrs. Richards."

"Oh, no! Karen and Bill? I know them."

"Well, nothing much was taken. Just a camera."

"Still . . ."

"Yes. We're working on it. Well, if you happen to remember anything—"

"Yes, I'll tell you. I'll call you."

The cop nodded, touched his cap, and shifted into gear. The car eased forward.

Suddenly she thought of something. "Wait a minute, officer!" she called. The patrol car's brake-lights glowed. It stopped. The cop looked out at her.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"There *was* one thing," she said.

Almost there. Other mothers waved from their yards, next to babies in playpens, or from the other side of the street, holding infants in their arms, bouncing them and talking to them. Around the corner was where Smith had left his car, a rental job, parked behind a VW van. An ordinary blue sedan, in need of washing

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—nothing to attract attention. Don't hurry, he told himself. You're invisible with the baby carriage.

It had taken him some time to find the kind of house he'd wanted—dark and shadowed, with shrubbery growing up around the windows to conceal his efforts, long hedges separating it from the street and the next house. No car in the drive. No garage. Mail still in the box.

He'd left the baby carriage on the sidewalk, gone up to the front door, and knocked. No answer. He'd gone around to one side, making sure no one was in the street, and stepped into the shrubbery, found an unlocked bathroom window, and climbed inside.

The camera and lenses had been on a table in the living room, and two hundred dollars in cash in a small box on a bedroom dresser. He found nothing else of interest in the time he'd allowed himself. Back out the window, there was no one in sight and he hurried around the house, reaching the baby carriage just as a woman came out the front door of the house directly across the street and waved, smiling. "Good morning," she'd called.

Smith had waved, too, and called back: "Good morning."

In another minute, he'd be inside the car and off to a different neighborhood. Tomorrow, a different town. Different rental car, same baby carriage. He was approaching the corner when he saw the marked patrol car approaching. Uniformed driver. Woman passenger in plainclothes. Two other women in the back seat, looked familiar. Don't panic, Smith told himself. Stay calm.

The patrol car stopped at the curb and the cop got out, smiling politely—a young guy, tanned face, mustache, looking fit. Smith smiled back and moved on. Don't panic.

"Just a minute, sir," said the cop.

The woman in the front of the patrol car, a young-housewife type, leaned across to call out from the open window: "He's the one, officer."

"Excuse me, sir," the policeman said, one hand resting very lightly on the handle of his holstered revolver. "Just routine. There's been some trouble in the neighborhood."

"Yes?"

"Could I just have a look at your baby?"

For a long minute Smith said nothing. There were, as always, two ways to go. He could feign indignation, put up a fight, and make a big scene. But people who shouted at cops drew attention to them-

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selves, left a photolike image in the cop's mind, to be recalled in some lineup down the road. Better to play it the other way.

"Are you asking to search my property, officer?" he asked, almost pleasantly.

"I'd like to check on your child," said the policeman. "That's all. Do you mind?"

There was nothing left to do. Smith watched as the cop reached inside the carriage and pulled back the blankets.

"Looks to me," said the cop, "like a little boy."

"Yes," said Smith, trying to find the right tone between impatience and pride. "Nine months today. Name's John. My wife and I are pretty crazy about him."

"I can see why," the policeman said automatically, turning to frown at the three women, who had climbed out of the patrol car and were staring at Smith with a mixture of fear and anger. He remembered them from his walk through the neighborhood. They weren't smiling now, though. Fear and anger.

"What'd I do wrong, officer?"

"They thought—" the cop began.

"Your baby," one of the mothers said angrily. "It never cried. It never made a sound."

And another: "You never touched it."

And the third: "You never even looked at it."

Smith shrugged, gently rocking the carriage back and forth. "He's a very good baby," he said simply.

"What about the blankets, officer?" one of them insisted. "Did you look under the blankets?"

The cop hesitated. "Well, I guess it wouldn't hurt. Unless—"

"Oh, go right ahead," Smith told him, showing impatience now.

The young policeman reached into the carriage again and felt around on either side of the baby and under it. He found a bottle partly filled with formula and a small rubber toy. The baby started to cry. The cop reddened visibly and stepped back. Stiffly, he said, "I apologize, sir. This has obviously been a mistake. Thank you for your cooperation."

"Don't mention it, officer," Smith said and pushed the carriage ahead toward the corner, the baby crying harder now.

The car was still behind the VW van, under the branches of a leafy poplar. Waiting long enough to make certain the cop wasn't going to pull up behind him, he opened the passenger-side door, lifted the baby out of the carriage, and handed it in to his wife.

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"Go all right?" she asked. He couldn't see her eyes for the huge sunglasses she wore, but he knew she was worried about the extra time it had taken.

"Yeah. Some women got suspicious and had a cop stop me. Having the baby actually in the carriage was a great idea."

He stowed the carriage in the trunk, then got in and drove around for a while. They stopped for a bite at a White Castle and waited for dark. Then he drove back to the corner house and stopped. No one was around.

"The hedge on the left," he told her. "Just even with the first side window. Camera, two lenses, some cash."

Carol got out and faded into the shadows, following the hedge toward the house. For a time she was lost in darkness, then she reappeared, came back to the car, and got in.

"Get it?" he asked.

"Yeah." She placed them on the seat between them. "Camera. Lenses. Cash."

He grinned and accelerated away from the curb. "That was another good idea. Leaving the stuff in the hedge in case they searched me."

"Which they did."

"Yeah." He shrugged in the darkness. "I guess I wasn't quite as invisible as I thought I was."

"We're going to run out of money if you don't start grabbing more expensive stuff," she told him.

"I'm working on it. Just keep finding the babies to take care of," he said, pulling up in front of a brick house with lighted windows. "Hurry it up, I want to get this car off the street."

Carol got out with the baby and went up the walk to the door. He saw the door open. She handed the baby through and someone gave her something. She came back to the car as the door closed again and got in beside him.

"Forty bucks," she said. "Five bucks an hour."

"So," he said, driving away, "we netted a hundred dollars today, easy. You're an okay baby sitter."

"You're an okay burglar."

They laughed. And the red lights flashed behind them.

"What the—?"

Headlights came on in front of them, blinding them. Uniformed police came from both directions and got him out of the car, leaned him against it. One read him his rights. On the other side of the

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car, the same thing was happening to Carol. His left and his right hands were pulled behind his back and he felt the familiar cold metal of the cuffs being snapped shut around his wrists. When they stood him up again and turned him around, he saw the young cop with the mustache smiling at him, and, next to him, an older, grimmer policeman.

They opened the trunk of the car and found the jewelry, money, and other items from the various neighborhoods he and Carol had visited this week.

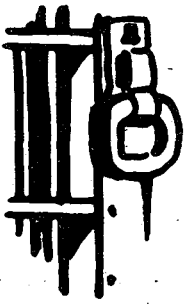
"How—?" was all he could manage.

The young cop answered him: "The lady whose camera you took. She went outside to see if you'd broken any other windows or doors trying to get inside, and she found the camera and money in the shrubbery. She phoned us, and we told her to leave them there, that chances were you'd be back for them. And the couple whose baby you watched for the afternoon got suspicious when they couldn't find your name in the phone directory. They wanted to call you and say they'd be back earlier than they'd said. So they called us instead. It started to fit together."

The cop took off his hat and scratched his head. "The only thing I can't figure is, why'd you push that baby carriage all over the neighborhood in the first place?"

"I thought," said Smith, "I'd be invisible."

The cop didn't understand that, but in the long run it didn't matter.



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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Clarissa's mother told her not to blame her father. He had problems from his childhood and when he drank it only made it worse. Clarissa could understand problems with childhood—she would be glad when hers was over . . .

DOCTOR WORKMAN

by WILLIAM BANKIER

This is for Doctor Workman.

My name is Clarissa Collins and I am ten years old. My father is an alcoholic. And I love him very much.

You asked me to write down everything I feel like writing about my father and my mother and about my sister Lola. Poor Doctor Workman, I sat in your office and watched you, and I think it made you uncomfortable. You lit your pipe a few times and scratched your beard, and after hours and hours went by you said I could write down what I'm thinking, I don't have to say it—although you think it will be better for me if I say it out loud at last.

I also hate my father because he gets angry and tries to hit my mother. He tried to hit her on Sunday afternoon and I don't see why, because it was Lola they were arguing about.

My sister Lola came home from a drive and she had red marks on her neck where a boy kissed her. My sister is fifteen and I guess when you're fifteen you get kissed very hard so it leaves marks. My mother began yelling at Lola and Lola cried and went upstairs, then my mother and father went on yelling at each other and he tried to hit her. I was alone in the kitchen and I could see down the hall through the crack where we keep the door propped open just enough to hear the music from the stereo, but not enough to let the kitten

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out because she'll scratch the furniture if she gets out of the kitchen. My mother was pushing my father back, but I don't think he was really trying to hit her because he's much bigger than she is. When she put her arms over her head, he stopped.

Then my father began to cry and my mother put her arms around him and told him not to worry, everything would be all right. But I could see her face and she looked very unhappy.

Doctor Workman, you told me to write down everything. I picked up the kitten and I squeezed her too hard because I felt angry and she began to make a noise and scratched my hand and I threw her across the room. I felt awful after that. I can't write any more now.

This is tomorrow. I went to the radio station after school today to watch my father do his program. He plays records and tapes for the people who are driving home from work. The program is called the Mark Collins Rolling Home Show because that's my father's name. He sits behind a desk in the studio, and whenever a record stops playing he becomes excited and starts talking into the microphone, pretending to be very young and happy. But as soon as the next record starts, he doesn't act happy any more.

He gave me one of the records to take home and gave me money for a taxi because he said he couldn't make it, he had to work late. When I got home, my mother said typical and made herself a drink. She only makes a drink when my father isn't there. When he is, she makes tea.

That's all. I'll bring this to the clinic when the family visits you on Thursday night.

Do you expect me to write about the sessions? You hear everything because you're there, wearing that old green sweater. You don't look like a doctor, Doctor Workman. You're too young, and you should wear a suit and a white shirt and tie, not jeans and an old green sweater and that beard. And that funny pipe you smoke all the time. You look more like one of the musicians on the cover of the record my father gave me than what I thought a doctor would look like. Maybe it's because you're a clinic doctor practicing to be a real doctor.

Lola called you a shrink on the way home. My mother told her to show a little respect and my father said leave the poor kid alone. Later, I asked Lola what shrink means and she said it's short for head-shrinker. I don't get it.

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The session was a waste of time. My father did all the talking, saying funny things and trying to make my mother laugh. I think he was just trying to impress you. But it didn't work, did it? I saw you watching him.

By the way, that scarf around Lola's neck was to hide the kiss marks. She never wears a scarf. Nobody said anything, I wondered if you noticed.

At home, my father said he can't be bothered going to any more of these sessions. My mother said it's our only hope. He said he has to work next Thursday night and she said we can always change the appointment. My father said that will be the day and he began to make himself a drink. My mother said take it easy, you have to go to work tomorrow and he said not till late in the afternoon.

I went to bed. Later I woke up because my father was wandering around on the back lawn. He was singing "The Rose of Tralee." My mother called out to him to come inside but he said you come outside, so she did. Then they both started laughing and I fell asleep.

This is two weeks later. I suppose there's no use writing my feelings down any more since we aren't coming to the sessions. But I don't mind writing. I like it. You said it would make me feel better and it does. So I'll bring this to the clinic on my way home from school and put it on the reception desk with your name on it.

I just read that over. My English teacher would say it is bad writing because it sounds as if your name is on the reception desk. Well, you know it isn't. I think you know quite a lot. You look very wise when you listen to us. But I also think it's easier to be wise about other people than about ourselves.

It will be Christmas in a couple of months. Even if we had no calendar, I would know. My mother is buying presents to send to our friends back in Canada. She always gets nervous that the packages will be late or they'll break open on the way across the ocean. My father is getting in lots of whisky so he'll have enough to give people when they visit. My mother said he'll drink all of it himself before the holidays. Everybody is very tense. I don't like Christmas.

I drew a picture of my sister asleep on the sofa. She was asleep and didn't know it. I mean, she knew she was asleep but she didn't know I was drawing the picture. Puss was sitting on the back of the sofa, asleep too. We had Puss's nails trimmed so now she can come out of the kitchen. I showed my father the picture and he laughed and said it was great. He showed my mother and she said he should

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buy a frame for it. This is too good to lose, she said. It's a scratchy drawing but it looks like Lola. That's all for now.

This is just a short note, Doctor Workman. I wanted to tell you my father bought the frame for my drawing. I was surprised, I never thought he'd do it. He hung it on the wall in the room downstairs where he goes by himself to drink and listen to his jazz records. It is beside the photograph of my father holding a microphone and talking to an American band leader. My mother said the band leader's name is Vaughan Monroe, whoever that is. My father's hair was short then, and black. I like it better now, long and with grey in it. That's all, I only wanted to tell you about the frame.

Hello, Doctor Workman, here I am again. We had a visitor from Canada. Her name is Beverly and she worked at the radio station in Montreal where my father used to do his program. She has moved to London to work as a journalist. She is taller than my mother and she has long blonde hair.

My mother brought my father into the kitchen where I was doing my homework. She whispered in this loud whisper she has. She said you have no business springing her on me. My father said cool it, she'll hear you. My mother said I don't give a damn. The ice-cube tray was stuck inside the freezer compartment and when my father pulled on it he cut his hand. Then he slammed the refrigerator door and when it swung open again he kicked it shut and made a mark in the white. My mother said that's right, wreck the place. My father said I'm thinking about it.

I couldn't do my homework after that. So I am writing this instead.

This is the rest of what I wrote yesterday. My father is not going to live with us any more. He is going to try living with Beverly. When he told my mother she said good, let *her* suffer.

Later she told me not to blame my father. He has problems from his childhood and when he drinks it only makes it worse. I can understand problems with childhood—I'll be glad when mine is over. But I won't ever drink whisky. I don't want my eyes to turn sleepy like his when he drinks. That's all. I don't think I'll write any more. What good does it do?

Here I am again. I can't seem to stop writing now. At school we're

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told not to start taking drugs because they're habit-forming. Well, I'm hooked on writing, Doctor Workman. And it's your fault.

I just want to tell you that everything is quiet at home now that my father's living with Beverly. I wonder if they yell at each other when my father gets drunk?

He's only been back twice since he went away. The first time he came to get some of his things. He took a few of his jazz records and then when I looked downstairs I saw the picture I drew of Lola is gone.

The second time he brought my mother some money and he stayed for a cup of tea. My mother got dressed up and brushed her hair and put on eye makeup the way she does when we have visitors. My father was sober and his face looked the way it does when he finishes shaving, very shiny, it looks as if it hurts. They sat across from each other at the kitchen table and drank tea and it was quiet. They were acting like two other people. It felt cold so I took Puss and went upstairs. My father came up to say goodbye but I pretended to be asleep.

My mother is busy telephoning her friends and ordering the turkey. One of her friends, Lionel, said not to worry, he would buy the tree. I hate this Christmas even more than the other ones. Goodbye now.

Two days later. Lionel brought the tree and he helped us decorate it. Then he stayed all night. I'm not supposed to know he slept in my father's bed. My mother kept the bedroom door closed when I was getting ready for school.

It's supposed to be a big secret but Lola told me all about it. My mother is thinking of getting a divorce from my father. Lola says it will spoil the divorce if the judge finds out another man stayed with her. Lionel is a lawyer. He is advising my mother what to do. I heard them talking. He said you won't have any trouble, the girls will give evidence of how violent he is. My mother said keep the girls out of this, I don't want them testifying against their father.

Later I heard Lionel say my father is a menace. Well, he is an alcoholic, too, my mother told me this a long time ago. I suppose being an alcoholic is the same as being a menace.

Lionel thinks my father should be put away for his own good and everybody else's. I hope my mother never marries Lionel.

This is Christmas Day. I'm going to go this afternoon and bring

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this note to the clinic. Mother and Lionel have gone to see about my father. I want to come and talk to you, Doctor Workman. I'll be able to speak now. When can I come?

* * *

Dr. David Workman met Clarissa Collins in the clinic waiting-room at 3:30 in the afternoon two days after Christmas. There were no other patients in attendance. He led her down the echoing corridor, he taking long strides over the dark linoleum, she clattering after him in her patent-leather shoes.

In his office, he closed the door and sat in his swivel chair, busying himself for a moment with some papers on his desk. Clarissa sat in the upholstered chair farthest from him. It was not far at all, the office being no more than a furnished closet. She looked at a set of wooden building blocks on a shelf beside her.

"Tell me what happened, Clarissa."

For the first time, she spoke in Dr. Workman's presence. "My father came home on Christmas Eve."

"Yes."

"We were singing carols around the tree. My mother was playing the piano the way she always does and we were singing 'Good King Wenceslas.' Lionel has a good voice, I'm sorry to say."

Dr. Workman put a finger below his lip and said nothing.

"Then there was a banging at the door. And I heard my father's voice shouting 'Ho ho ho!' He was being Santa Claus, the way he always used to. My mother opened the door and he came in with a big sack over his shoulder—only it wasn't a sack, it was a sheet off a bed and it wasn't full of presents like it used to be when he played Santa before. It was full of all his things, his pajamas and his records and his alarm clock and his razor. And my drawing of Lola was there, but the frame was broken."

Dr. Workman finished lighting a cigarette and said: "Then what happened?"

"My father told Lionel to get the hell out of his house. He didn't say it very loud, but Lionel went to get his things right away. My mother told Lionel to be a man but he put on his hat and coat and went out the door."

Nothing was said for a few minutes. Dr. Workman's chair squeaked once when he crossed his legs. Clarissa reached over and took two of the wooden blocks, held one in each hand, and pressed

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them against each other, taking great care to see the edges matched perfectly.

Then: "You said in your note that your mother and Lionel went to see about your father."

"My father is in jail."

With this revelation, Clarissa began to understand what Dr. Workman had been telling her about the value of talking. The idea of her father being behind bars had been weighing her down like a load of stones. Now that the information had been spilled out, she felt light and free and eager to tell the rest of it. To publicize the shameful story was, all at once, a satisfying thing to do. She could almost have wished the details were more shocking.

"The police came late on Christmas Eve after I was in bed. Lola was still up with my parents, watching a late movie on television. I wasn't asleep, I was listening to the sound of the television. Every now and then my father would laugh, but it wasn't as if anything was funny."

"Nervous laughter." Dr. Workman stubbed out his cigarette.

"When the police came, I went to the top of the stairs and listened. They were very polite. They asked my father if he knew Beverly Simons and if he had been at her apartment earlier that night. Then they asked him to come with them, and they told him if he said anything they would take it down and use it in evidence. It was like what the police say on television."

"Let me get this straight," Dr. Workman said. "Your father has been arrested on suspicion of murdering this Beverly woman. The person he went to live with after he left home. Is that what happened?"

"The neighbors heard arguing between Beverly and my father. They knew who he is so they were able to report him to the police. One of them came around to see Beverly about something hours later and found her dead on the floor. Her head was bleeding."

"What does your father say?"

"He admitted there was an argument. He said he didn't need a lawyer, he was innocent. He wanted to come home on Christmas Eve and be with his family. Beverly said a lot of nasty things to him while he was putting his things together in a sheet. He yelled at her but that was all."

"What do the rest of the family think?"

"My mother thinks he hit her and knocked her down. She doesn't

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believe he meant to kill her. Lionel thinks he killed her on purpose. Lola thinks he killed her by accident."

"And you, Clarissa? What do you think?"

"I believe Daddy. They argued and he went away. He wanted to be with us at Christmas."

"Then who caused the young woman's death?"

Clarissa considered. "I think Lionel did it. He was mad at Daddy for throwing him out of our house so he went to Beverly's apartment and killed her. He wanted revenge."

Dr. Workman gave Clarissa a long, penetrating look from inside his nest of moustache and beard with the glasses on top like windows. You never could tell what Dr. Workman was thinking inside his hidey-hole. All you got out of him was what he said. "That is a childish idea, Clarissa. It makes no sense at all."

"What do you think, then?" Clarissa asked him.

"The most obvious explanation is the most likely one. I don't believe your father meant to kill the girl. They argued, perhaps they struggled. She was killed accidentally."

"Then what about the other wine glass?" Clarissa said. "I heard one of the policemen mention it when he asked Daddy if anybody was with him at the apartment. There were three glasses on the table. Daddy said nobody else was there."

Workman smiled. "You're a regular little detective. The other glass could have been there from before. The girl might have used it earlier for something else and then poured two fresh glasses later. Anyway, if the police are not concerned—"

"I think the police just want to get everything tidied up," Clarissa said. "They have Daddy in jail. They don't want to know any more."

After a silence, the doctor said: "You look sad."

She said nothing.

"What are you thinking?"

Her thoughts were such a mixture of fear and anger, it seemed impossible to express them.

"What would make you happy?"

"I want to go to Beverly's apartment and see for myself."

"See what?"

"Whatever there is. I know Daddy never hurt her. If I can see for myself, I'll know what really happened."

Dr. Workman nodded. "Fair enough. But I don't think there is any way the police will let us visit the scene of the crime."

"We don't have to ask them," Clarissa said. "I have the key. When

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Daddy came home on Christmas Eve and unloaded all his things from the sheet, he put a key on his dresser. I knew what it was. I took it—so he could never go back there."

"You are a very resourceful girl, Clarissa Collins." Dr. Workman got to his feet, patting his pockets with a distracted expression on his face. Then he picked up a pack of cigarettes and moved toward the door. "Come," he said, handing her a satchel that rested on a table. "Carry this for me and we'll go to the girl's apartment."

"What is it?"

"My bag of tricks. I'm not only a psychiatrist. First I became a regular doctor, and I still am. I like to be able to deal with an emergency."

The apartment was a sad place. Clarissa was fascinated to see the rooms where her father had lived during the time he was away from home. She looked for signs of his former presence but saw nothing—he had brought everything home with him in that Santa Claus bundle.

"Are you satisfied?" Dr. Workman inquired.

"I don't know."

"Don't spend all day. I wouldn't want to be found here if the police came back."

Clarissa checked the tiny kitchen, then the surprisingly large bathroom with an old-fashioned tub on clawed feet. When she came back to the living room, Dr. Workman was still standing, lighting his pipe. Her mind concentrated on this precise business. When he finally achieved ignition and blew a cloud of pale smoke into the air, she said: "You've found your pipe."

"What?"

"You smoked a cigarette in your office, the first time I've seen you do that. You had another in the car on the way here. Now you're back to your pipe again."

"Ach, zo—" He said it in a funny way with a smile on his face.

"You must have left it here. You were with her after my father went away, while she was still alive. There *was* somebody else here—it was you!"

"Nonsense."

"What kind of wine did you drink from the other glass?"

"Time we were going, Clarissa."

"Yes, I want to go home and tell my mother to call the police."

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"You think they'd believe a story like this? My pipe was in my pocket all the time."

"No it wasn't. The police will ask you questions. They'll find out the truth."

There was a silence broken only by the comfortable little puffs of Dr. Workman smoking his pipe. Clarissa thought it sounded like a baby feeding. At last he went to his satchel and began to open it. "You aren't going to the police. You're a mentally disturbed child. I'm not going to take any chances of your hurting yourself. Your father's involvement in this murder has left you hysterical. It's my professional opinion that you've inherited a degree of emotional instability from him. I'm going to give you sedation and then I'm going to recommend to your mother that you stay at the clinic for a time while we treat your illness."

"You can't give me medicine if I don't want it."

"I propose a couple of these capsules." He took a phial from the satchel. "If you won't take them, I can always use a needle—would you prefer that? And if you become too much of a handful, I can ring the hospital for help."

Clarissa thought of screaming the ceiling down. She considered running for the door and fighting him tooth and claw if he tried to stop her. But wisdom reminded her that this sort of behavior would confirm his diagnosis of her as a disturbed girl. He was the adult, the doctor—she was only the child. Everything he said would be believed and she would be the raging little monster who needed to be put away.

"I'll take the capsules," she said.

They went into the kitchen and filled a glass with water. She washed down the capsules one at a time, the Doctor observing her closely, even checking her open mouth afterward to make sure they were not concealed behind her teeth. Then he said: "Time to go. Sorry about this, dear. I don't want to hurt you."

"I have to go to the bathroom," she said.

"All right, but hurry." He looked around as if the rooms were alive and they might wake up at any minute.

Clarissa locked herself inside the bathroom, surprised that he allowed her to be by herself. He was not much of a villain. She turned on both of the taps so the sound of running water would cover up what she had to do. Vomiting had always come easy for her—she could never understand why it bothered some people. Now she leaned

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over the toilet, put a finger down her throat, and brought up everything in her stomach, including the capsules.

When she rejoined Dr. Workman in the living room, he was sitting on the window ledge, his hands on his knees, his pipe between his teeth. He was staring at the floor as if a colony of ants were at work there.

Clarissa put on a drowsy voice. "Why did you do it? I know you did it. Can you tell me why?"

"Your father telephoned me from here early on Christmas Eve. He said he could feel terrible pressure building up in him and he had to see me." Workman seemed anxious to talk, as if it was necessary for him to unburden himself. Clarissa found it interesting—the poor man spent all his time listening to troubled people. Now it was his turn to dump the load.

"I told him to hold on, not to do anything," he continued, "but when I got here, he'd gone. The woman was here alone, in a frustrated, angry mood. She insisted I have a glass of wine with her. I didn't want to stay but I could see how upset she was. So I had a glass, then another. I don't mind saying, apart from her incipient hysteria I found her an attractive person. And interesting—it seemed to me fortunate in more ways than one that I had come into her life. So I began to relax and enjoy myself."

When he fell silent, Clarissa waited a precise period of time and then made the prompting sound she had become accustomed to hearing during her visits in the Doctor's office. "Yes?" she said quietly.

"After about an hour, I went to the john. I must have returned quicker than she expected, because when I came back into this room I caught her going through my satchel. She was looking for drugs. I'm an experienced man, but this shocked me. It was the last thing I expected—or perhaps I mean I didn't want to believe she was interested in me for what she could get out of me. My pride was hurt.

"I threatened to report her to the police. She became aggressive. She said she'd say I'd attacked her. She tore the front of her dress and said she was going to scream. I think she was enjoying my panic. I had to stop her making a noise, so I put my hand over her mouth and we struggled."

Clarissa allowed the silence to endure. At last, Dr. Workman sighed and said: "That was when she fell off balance and struck her head on a sharp corner of that marble coffee table. It was bad luck."

Still pretending to be drowsy, Clarissa said: "You didn't do any-

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thing wrong. It was an accident. Why not tell the police? They'd believe you."

He shook his head. "Even that much involvement would make a mess of my career. Young psychiatrist drinking with a disturbed woman. Struggling with her. Where there's smoke, there's fire. The clinic is cutting jobs right now—an economy drive. They'd let me go and the suspicion of misbehavior would remain on my file forever." He got to his feet. "Come on, it's time to go." He took her arm. "I'll help you down the stairs."

In the car, Clarissa decided to abandon her fake stupor. "Dr. Workman," she said brightly, "I'm not sedated. I threw up in the bathroom."

He glanced at her. "You are something else, child."

"You aren't a bad man. You help people. This was just an accident. My father hasn't helped anybody in years. Not us, his family—not even himself. We've been falling apart because of him."

"Go on."

"They said it would be called manslaughter, so if he's convicted and goes to jail it won't be forever. He'll have to stop drinking. And Mum is on his side again now—they're together the way they used to be."

"What are you saying, Clarissa?"

"That I think I shouldn't tell the police anything. Let the situation stand. It isn't the truth, but it's better than the truth."

Dr. Workman's pipe, which had been clenched between his teeth, had somehow fallen to the floor. She bent to retrieve it. "Now will you take me home?"

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Face it, a dying message depends entirely too much on the eye of the beholder . . .

NOTHING OF THE KIND

by EDWARD WELLEN

Ernest Furth gave his flat one last all-encompassing scan. Everything in order? Everything out of place that was usually out of place in a bachelor's apartment? He didn't want Mrs. O'Keeffe thinking he was leaving for good. It would give him that much more of a head-start if people thought he'd be coming back. All set?

All set. The carry-on bag packed with the few belongings he cared to take. Just one more thing, then.

He carried a kitchen chair into the bedroom and set it down next to the window. He moved the flower pot from the center of the sill to one side—he was short and would have to put one foot on the sill. He stepped up onto the chair seat, raised one foot to the sill, and reached up to the channel holding the venetian blind's tilt mechanism.

Before he could remove the metal slide that locked one end of the housing, he felt his chest seize up as though in the squeeze of a mighty fist and saw the world blur dizzily. Clutching at the pain with one hand and at air with the other, he fell backward off the chair.

Alex Nashchek rang the doorbell and listened to its dying echo. Not there, or not answering. Nashchek glanced around, then gained entry with a state-of-the-art picklock—battery-powered, with transistorized sensors that told a microchip what tiny rods to trigger to fit the lock. Nashchek slipped quickly and quietly inside and pushed the door to.

Furth had been behaving suspiciously of late. Nashchek regretted now that he had put off reporting his hunch that Furth might be thinking of defecting or of going into business for himself—secrets to the highest bidder instead of to the land to which he owed his

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first loyalty. Uneasiness—more, guilt and fear—had driven Nashchek to come here when Furth failed to deliver the promised microfilm.

Nashchek stepped into the bedroom and stopped. Furth lay on the floor, staring from the other side of death. Nashchek recovered himself. He found the condition of the body dispassionately satisfying. Natural death. Furth had not blown his cover and been murdered. On the other hand, the packed bag cried out that death had come upon Furth not a moment too soon.

But where was the microfilm? Nashchek went through Furth's clothing and the carry-on without turning it up. He straightened and looked around with a heavy sigh at the thought of having to toss the whole place.

But, ah! Furth had remained true after all—had lived just long enough to scrawl a dying message!

WATER PLANT

But what did that mean? A water plant was a lily or a lotus. Furth's flat held nothing of the kind.

Wait. Public places were more private. Furth would have picked the Botanical Gardens. The location was unauthorized, but Nashchek knew the sort of drop Furth favored: the underside of a park bench or a pay-phone ledge, a wad of gum holding the small envelope in place.

After repacking the flight bag carefully and without disturbing anything further, Nashchek let himself out of the flat and out of the building.

Halfway along the street, he swore. He had forgotten to take the piece of paper with the dying message on it. He half turned to head back, then saw a car had just pulled up in front of the apartment building. He quickly faced forward again. So be it. He stepped up his pace. He had a head-start and meant to make the most of it.

Kurt Laufer was in business for himself. He had no state-of-the-art picklock, but a plastic credit card served quite as well.

He too stopped short on seeing Furth sprawled dead. Then his eyes lit on the packed bag and he smiled his jackal's smile. Timely death. The smile faded as Furth's pockets and bag turned up no microfilm. He looked around with a frown.

Aha! Furth had lasted long enough to scribble a note to his contact.

WATER PLANT

His smile returned, the meaning of the message flashing across

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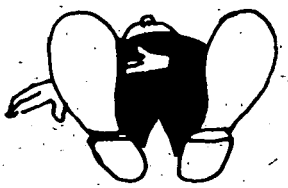
his mind. Water plant could mean only the municipal sewage-treatment facility. No problem. The drop had to be in a spot accessible to the public. Laufer knew the kind of drop Furth would use . . .

A key turning in the lock froze him, but only for a second. Swiftly, he grabbed Furth's legs and dragged him into the closet, folding him inside. Luckily he was not yet stiff. Laufer grabbed the carry-on, crowded himself into the closet with Furth, and closed the door all but a crack.

A woman's step. When the woman went into the kitchen, Laufer slipped out, closed the closet door, and stole out of the flat without the woman becoming aware of him.

Having let herself into Mr. Furth's flat, Mrs. Grail O'Keeffe went straight to the kitchen to make herself a pot of tea. While the kettle was working up to a boil, Mrs. O'Keeffe took off her hat and coat and put on her dusting smock.

She stood with her hands on her hips and looked into the bedroom, nodding knowingly. Look at that kitchen chair out of place. Men. Where would they be without women to do for them? She spotted the message. WATER PLANT. She sniffed, but filled a pitcher at the tap before going to the closet for the vacuum cleaner and starting in on the heavy work. "As if he had to remind me."



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a *NEW* short story by

HUGH PENTECOST

"Hillerman and Jimmy Markham creamed Mrs. Markham, who is the woman club champion, and *the club pro," Sergeant Smalley said. "Eight up at five bucks a hole earned Hillerman forty bucks. That may be the last Bagley money he ever sees."*

Introducing Frank Lewis, business agent for star athletes, and his young client, Clyde Hillerman, prime suspect in the murder of Bill Bagley, owner of The Pony Express football team . . .

ACCESSORY AFTER THE FACTS

by HUGH PENTECOST

I don't ordinarily sleep too well in a strange hotel room in a strange town, but that night I'd turned in early and gone out like a light. It had been a long, hard day dealing with a tough customer. When I awoke, realizing that someone was knocking on the door of the room, I was first annoyed and then suddenly alarmed. I didn't know anyone who might be calling on me and it occurred to me it might be some kind of emergency, like a fire.

I stumbled out of bed and went to the door. There was a chain lock that let me open it a few inches without letting anyone in. Standing outside was a hard-looking character with a mouth like a knife slit. "Are you Frank Lewis?" he asked.

I admitted I was.

He held out his hand, and in it was a small leather case. It was open and revealed a police badge. "Sergeant Smalley, City Police," he said.

I tried smiling at him. "Whatever it is I didn't do it."

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"May I come in?"

"I have to close the door to open it," I said.

When I let the policeman in, he looked around the relatively bare room. "You alone?" he asked.

"You can see."

"That door?"

"Bathroom. All the comforts of home."

The sergeant crossed over and opened the bathroom door.

"I'm starting not to be amused," I told him.

"You're a sort of business agent for star athletes, aren't you, Mr. Lewis?"

"Not 'sort of,' " I said. "I'm a business agent for star athletes."

"Is Clyde Hillerman one of your clients?"

"He is."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"I'm Clyde's business agent, Sergeant, not his nursemaid."

"You know Bill Bagley, owner of The Pony Express football team?" Smalley asked.

"I know him in the sense that I spent the day trying to negotiate a contract with him for Clyde Hillerman. A one-day personal acquaintance."

"I hope you got your contract signed, sealed, and delivered," Smalley said, "because Bagley won't be negotiating with you again."

"Why not?"

"Because he's dead," Smalley said. "We suspect he was murdered by Clyde Hillerman, your client."

"You have to be kidding!"

"I'm not kidding about the murder, nor am I kidding about the suspect," Smalley said.

I stared at him. "I have a bottle of bourbon in my top bureau drawer, Sergeant. Can you drink on duty?"

"Thanks, no."

I went over to the bureau, took the fifth of Jack Daniels out of the top drawer, and poured some in the water glass on the bureau. I swallowed it and turned back to Smalley.

"Bagley's secretary tells me you spent most of the day with him," he said. "In his office, then out at lunch, then back in his office."

"What happened to him?"

"Do you know where Hillerman spent the day?"

"I know where he planned to spend the day. He was going to play

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golf with Bagley's daughter, Mrs. Markham, her son Jimmy Markham, and the local club pro."

"He did." Smalley's smile was humorless. "Hillerman and Jimmy Markham creamed Mrs. Markham, who is the woman club champion, *and* the club pro. Eight up at five bucks a hole earned Hillerman forty bucks. That may be the last Bagley money he ever sees."

"Will you get to it, Sergeant?"

"Hillerman went back to the Bagley estate with the lady and her son. They invited him for cocktails and dinner."

"Bill Bagley doesn't serve liquor in his house," I said. "He's a raving teetotaler."

"Your Clyde Hillerman got himself some liquor, however," Smalley said. "I suspect from the grandson, Jimmy Markham. After dinner, Bagley took Hillerman off to his study to discuss the potential contract with him. They were gone a long time and finally Rose Markham went to check on them. Hillerman was passed out cold on the couch and Bill Bagley was dead on the floor, his brains beaten out by a jack handle that came from Hillerman's car. While Mrs. Markham was calling the police, Hillerman came to and took off before he could be stopped."

"How do you know the jack handle came from Clyde's car?"

"When Hillerman took off, he didn't stop to take his car, which was parked outside the house," the sergeant said. "The hatchback was open, the tool compartment open, and the jack handle missing."

"I don't think you're making sense, Sergeant," I said. "You're saying Clyde had an argument with Bagley, went out to his car, got the jack handle from his tool kit, came back in, murdered Bagley, and then passed out on the couch where Mrs. Markham found him?"

"Something like that," the sergeant said.

"I don't know how much you know about the world of sports," I said. "Not too long ago a young professional basketball player signed a contract for seven years with the Boston Celtics for better than two million dollars a year."

"The connection?" Smalley asked.

"Clyde Hillerman was trying for a contract with Bagley for less than half of that, but for a hell of a lot of money all the same. He wouldn't go to Bagley's house and drink, because he knows how Bagley feels about liquor. No matter what kind of an argument they had, he wouldn't blow his stack. There was a small fortune at stake and he's not a dummy. He's a bright, intelligent kid with a golden career ahead of him."

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"All logical enough," Smalley said, "but he'd been drinking and was passed out cold when Mrs. Markham found him, with her father dead at his feet. Mrs. Markham shook him to try to wake him, and failing that she went to the phone to call the police. That's when Hillerman came to and took off."

"And didn't go for his car?"

"The keys were still in the open hatchback. He was probably too confused to remember that he'd used them and left them in the lock. He had to get away fast so he took off on foot."

"He isn't a drinker. I know that for a fact."

"Maybe. But he was drinking tonight." Smalley's cold blue eyes were fixed on me steadily. "Hillerman will undoubtedly try to get in touch with you, Mr. Lewis. He has no friends here in Stamford. If you try to hide him or help him get away, you'll be charged as an accessory after the fact in a murder."

"If he gets in touch with me, I promise you I'll urge him to turn himself in," I said. "Everything I know about him makes me think there's something cockeyed about all this. He's not a drinker and he's not a killer."

I should make it clear that Clyde Hillerman, dubbed The Whip by the sportswriters who cover college football, was not, on that day in a New England city, a personal friend. But the coach of his college football team *was* an old friend, and when Hillerman, the all-American quarterback with the whiplike arm, was approaching graduation and a dozen pro-football teams were salivating over the possibility of signing him, Buck O'Neil, the coach, knew that his protégé needed a shrewd business agent to conclude a deal for him and recommended me. Hillerman came to see me and we made an agreement whereby I'd represent him for the next ten years. It meant a handsome sum in commissions for me.

Hillerman was a handsome, blond young man with a justifiable dream of what his future could be. I found him amiable and level-headed to deal with. Bill Bagley, the eccentric millionaire owner of The Pony Express football team, was the first of the clamoring owners I approached for The Whip. Bagley's team was close to championship quality, and a brilliant young quarterback like Hillerman could be a step toward the Super Bowl. They took him in the college draft and therefore had the negotiating rights under the rules. When I contacted Bagley, he'd suggested I bring Hillerman up to Stamford

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where he had a summer home to discuss a possible contract. I could tell from our phone conversation how eager he was.

I knew enough about the old man to be aware of some of his demands—no liquor, no drugs, no possible scandals—and I warned The Whip.

"No problem," he told me. "I don't drink and won't as long as physical condition is what I have to sell. I wouldn't touch drugs with a ten-foot pole. As for scandal, well, I don't gamble, and I don't have gamblers as friends."

"Women?" I asked him.

He gave me a not-too-friendly look. "My private life is my business, Frank."

Still, there was nothing here that could give Bill Bagley any reason to hesitate. But now the old man was dead and the cops were after The Whip as a prime suspect. Smalley was probably right. Clyde would try to get in touch with me. I decided to get dressed and be ready for him. I was tempted to have another bourbon, but decided I'd better be ready for whatever.

"Whatever" turned out to be a phone call.

"Mr. Lewis?"

"Yes."

"My name is O'Neil. I'm a reporter for the local newspaper." It was a high, almost falsetto voice. "I understand your boy Hillerman is in big trouble."

"So?"

"I don't want to talk to you on the phone. Someone can be listening in. But I have some information that may interest you."

"All right, come and tell me about it."

"I don't want to risk encountering cops who may be watching you," the voice said. "You come out of the hotel, turn left, and then do a K-17. There's a little park. You'll find me sitting on a bench there."

I was about to tell him to go chase himself when I suddenly found myself gripping the phone as if my life depended on it. O'Neil was the name of Clyde's old coach and friend. K-17 was a double reverse play with which The Whip had scored a touchdown in last year's Rose Bowl. And that falsetto voice was a fake. It was Hillerman calling me, trying to clue me in.

"I'll see what I can do," I said grudgingly, hoping he'd read through the tone of my voice that I'd caught on.

When I left the hotel room, there was no sign of anyone watching

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the hall outside. I took the flight of stairs to the lobby. The clock over the desk showed me it was about half an hour before midnight. There was very little traffic in the lobby and I didn't see anyone hanging around who looked like a cop. I walked over to the glass-top door that led to the telephone switchboard.

"I'm Frank Lewis in 208," I told one of the women operators. She looked instantly interested. Sergeant Smalley had probably given orders to have my phone monitored. "I'm going out for a few minutes," I told her. "I'm expecting an important call from a client of mine, Mr. Clyde Hillerman."

The woman struggled to look deadpan.

"If Mr. Hillerman calls, tell him I hope to be back by one at the latest."

"Of course, Mr. Lewis." I guessed she couldn't wait to report to Smalley.

I walked out of the hotel onto the relatively deserted street and turned left, then walked a few yards down the sidewalk, reversed myself, and headed the other way. As far as I could tell, no one was paying the slightest attention to me.

The park was in the next block beyond the hotel—trees and shrubs with an iron fence surrounding it. I found the entrance gate and went in. There were no lamps or lights, but the night glow from the city kept it from being totally dark. Opposite a fountain that spouted water in a steady stream was a bench and a blond man sitting on it. It was The Whip.

"Keep walking," he said, "in case someone is following you."

No one was, I was sure of that, but I walked on past him without speaking. A few yards away, I stopped and turned. There was no sign of anyone but The Whip on the bench. He gestured to me and I walked back and sat down beside him.

"I was coming to see you when I saw the police cars outside the hotel," Clyde said. "I waited for them to go and then I called you from a sidewalk booth."

"I know the police side of the story," I said. "What really happened, Clyde?"

"I don't honestly know," he said.

"You were in the room with the man! He was dead!"

"You know I don't drink," he said.

"But you did tonight?"

"Yes and no."

"Try to make sense, will you, Clyde?"

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"Golf. You know I was going to play with Rose Markham, her son Jimmy, and the club pro."

"And you won forty bucks."

"I was hot. The lady's pretty good, but she and the pro weren't any match for Jimmy and me."

"So you won forty bucks and celebrated?"

"No. The Bagley estate is right next to the golf course, overlooking Long Island Sound. Mr. Bagley and his lawyers were waiting there for us to join them after the game was over. I suspected the old man was going to try to talk me into something a little less than you were bargaining for."

"You're under contract to me, boy. You can't make a deal for yourself."

"I know that. But old man Bagley thought he could persuade me to persuade you to accept his deal."

"You said 'yes and no' when I asked you about drinking."

"We went back to the house from the golf club. Just before, in the locker room, Jimmy said if I wanted a drink I'd better have it there, there was no drinking in his grandfather's house. I told him I didn't want to offend the old man with the smell of liquor on my breath."

"So you didn't have a quick one?"

"No. We went back to the house. There was an elaborate table of food waiting for us—and soft drinks. A lawyer named Martin Jacquith was there with the old man. Not Bagley's generation—more like your age. The conversation was all about the golf game. The food was wild. When I helped myself from a hot chafing dish of shrimp in lobster sauce, Rose Markham recommended that since I was 'eating Chinese' I should have iced tea to go with it—'A special blend of tea my father imports from Taiwan,' she told me. She made the tea for me and Jimmy brought me the glass. I took one taste of it and knew it had been loaded with bourbon or brandy or something. I looked around, surprised, and Jimmy Markham winked at me. The younger generation secretly bypassing the old man, I thought. Naturally, I didn't comment. So we talked about the golf and I ate my food and drank my loaded iced tea. Then I suddenly felt a little dizzy. It couldn't be the booze, I told myself. I could drink this much and not have that kind of reaction. Too much sun? Something about the Chinese food?

"I lost track of the conversation, trying to get hold of myself. Old man Bagley suggested I go into the study with him where we could

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talk in private about a possible deal. I think I was weaving a little when I followed him.

"In the study, the old man talked about the advantages of signing with The Pony Express. After a while, the room really began to spin and I guess I toppled over on the couch. The old man was bending over me, and then he stormed to the door. 'Someone get this drunken slob out of here!' I heard him shout—and then everything went black. The last thought I had before I passed out was that someone had fixed me a Mickey Finn."

"You aren't used to liquor," I said.

"I take a drink now and then in the off season," The Whip said. "Enough to know I wasn't reacting normally."

"And then?"

"I came to, I don't know how much later, still on the couch. Rose Markham was shaking me, screaming at me, 'You murdered him! You son of a bitch, you've murdered my father!' I saw the old man lying there, his head smashed in, blood everywhere. His daughter ran to the phone and I could hear her shouting at the operator to get the police."

He drew a deep breath. "My only thought was to get out of there. I staggered up and headed outside for my car. Rose Markham shouted after me to stop. When I got to the car, I found I didn't have my keys. My only thought was to get away from there and I staggered off into the woods."

"The hatchback of your car was open," I told him. "Your keys were in the lock. The jack handle used to kill Bagley was taken from your tool kit."

"Somebody framed me," he said. "What possible reason could I have for killing the old man?"

"You didn't need a reason. You were stoned out."

"Not on my own, I wasn't," he said. "You've got to go out there, Frank—see what you can smell out."

"It's midnight," I said.

"Nobody's going to be sleeping out at the Bagley place," he said. His face clouded. "Never mind. Maybe you shouldn't go. There's a killer out there."

"I probably won't get in," I said. "They'll have cops protecting them."

"Yes," he said. "They know they're in no danger, but they'll have to make it look as though they think they are."

"They?" I said.

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"Rose Markham, the lawyer, Jimmy Markham—at least one of them has to know what really happened."

One thing was certain, I told myself as I went back to the hotel for my car. Clyde Hillerman was telling me the truth, as far as he knew it. The police wouldn't believe him. The Markhams and their lawyer, local celebrities, would make their story stick, true or false.

Clyde insisted on driving out to the Bagley estate with me.

"You'll just let the cops have you," I said.

"Drop me off before you actually go into the property," he said. "I'll find my way in on foot."

"Why?"

"If you need help, I'll be there," The Whip said.

"It could have been someone who was waiting his chance, someone we don't know anything about at all," I said.

"Who fed me the Mickey Finn?" he asked.

I got my car from the hotel parking area and picked him up a few blocks down the street. It was probably a little insane to play detective in this situation, but there was just a chance I could come up with something Sergeant Smalley had missed. He had no reason to believe in The Whip's innocence. I did.

We drove out of the city and into the countryside along the Sound. After a while Clyde pointed out a big house set back from the road, lights blazing in the windows. I let him out and drove through the stone gates into the Bagley property.

I stopped near the front door and had only just switched the motor off when someone was at the window on my side, pointing a gun at me. He had cop written all over him.

"You looking for someone?" he asked.

"Mrs. Markham or young Mr. Markham," I said.

"You know what's going on out here?"

"I know there's been a murder," I said.

"Heard it on the radio?"

"No. I heard it from Sergeant Smalley."

The cop's eyes narrowed. "Smalley wouldn't talk to a reporter."

"I'm not a reporter. My name is Frank Lewis. I'm the business agent for Clyde Hillerman."

"You got any I.D. on you?"

I showed him my driver's license and a couple of credit cards. While he was looking at them, a young man came out of the house. He was tall, dark-haired, and clean-cut, wearing a sports jacket and

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a navy-blue sports shirt. "I saw the headlights in the driveway," he said. "I thought it might be a friend of mine." He peered through the car window at me. "I don't think I know you. We're under instructions not to talk to the press."

I told him who I was. "I thought you and your mother might be able to help me and I might be able to help you."

"Do you know where Clyde is?" the young man asked. "I'm Jimmy Markham, as you've guessed."

"I don't know where he is," I said. That was the literal truth. He was somewhere around, but I couldn't say exactly where. "But I've been in touch with him."

"And he says he didn't do it," the cop said, his voice cynical.

"He didn't do it," I said.

"Then why doesn't he turn himself in? There's an all-state alarm out for him. If he's been near a radio he knows that."

Jimmy Markham interrupted. "I think my mother and I would like to hear what Mr. Lewis has to tell us."

"That's up to you," the cop said. "But you're not leaving here, Lewis, until I get an okay from Sergeant Smalley."

I got out of the car and Jimmy Markham and I started up the path toward the front door.

"I'm afraid there isn't much question that Clyde killed my grandfather," Jimmy said, "and yet it doesn't make sense. He wanted to get along with my grandfather. He wanted to sign up with The Pony Express." He shook his head. "I guess he just can't handle liquor."

"He doesn't drink," I said.

"He was drunk tonight," Jimmy said. "When he went off to the study with my grandfather, I knew he was potted."

"*You* gave him some iced tea," I said. "You winked at him when you handed it to him. When he tasted it, he figured you'd loaded it—as a favor to a guest in a dry household."

Jimmy stopped and faced me. "I winked at him?"

"That's what he says. He thought after he tasted it that you were telling him you'd done him a favor."

Jimmy shook his head. "If there was liquor in that iced tea I sure as hell didn't put it there, and I didn't know it was there."

"Your mother prepared the iced tea?"

Jimmy laughed. "You can bet *she* didn't spike that tea. In the first place, there isn't a drop of liquor in the house. In the second place, my grandfather would disinherit her if he thought she served anyone liquor."

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"Who, then—if it wasn't you or your mother? Your lawyer?"

"Martin? Hell, no. He wouldn't risk offending my grandfather just to please a young athlete. Being on my grandfather's good side was much too important to him."

"Who else is there?"

"Martin suggested that Clyde was carrying his own supply—in a pocket flask."

"Who is it, Jimmy?" a woman's voice called out. I turned and saw a handsome woman standing in the doorway, still in the sports clothes she must have worn for the afternoon golf match. She had to be Rose Markham, Jimmy's mother.

Jimmy introduced us and suddenly hostility was written all over her. Her dark-blue eyes were suddenly bright with anger. "I don't think you and I have anything to talk about, Mr. Lewis," she said.

"We both want the same thing," I said. "The truth about what happened to your father."

"I know the truth," she said. "I caught that young monster dead to rights."

"I just told your son that I've talked to Clyde," I said. "There are a couple of things that bother me."

"Tell them to the police," Rose Markham said and turned away. But she was blocked from re-entering the house by a man who appeared from the inside.

"I think it might be valuable to hear what's bothering Mr. Lewis, Rose," he said.

He was a handsome guy, reminding me a little of a younger Laurence Olivier. "I'm Martin Jacquith, Mrs. Markham's lawyer," he told me. He had a pleasant, cultivated voice.

"And having been Mr. Bagley's lawyer as well, you must be as anxious as I am for the truth," I said.

Jacquith stood aside. "Let's go in," he said.

The living room of the Bagley house was most attractive. French windows opened onto a terrace overlooking the Sound, a gentle salt breeze moving the curtains that framed them. I'm not an art critic but I suspected that several of the paintings on the walls were worth a fortune. There were no signs of the earlier refreshments that Clyde had described to me.

"You've been in touch with Hillerman?" Jacquith asked me. No one suggested I sit down.

"Yes."

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"You've notified the police?"

"I think Sergeant Smalley knows. The switchboard at the hotel was listening in on my phone."

"I'm afraid whatever he told you was a coverup, Mr. Lewis. There's no question that he killed Mr. Bagley."

"He was passed out on the couch when I found him—and my father," Rose Markham said. "He had blood on his hands."

"There's something that puzzles me," I said. "I know Hillerman doesn't carry a pocket flask. He's not a drinker. He told me that when he was handed a glass of iced tea it was heavily spiked."

"That's absurd," Rose Markham said. "We don't have liquor in this house. My father wouldn't stand for it."

"Hillerman didn't say anything because he thought your son was doing him a favor. But the drink affected him more than he thought it could."

"He had to invent some kind of a story," Jacquith said.

I continued to address Mrs. Markham. "Hillerman felt himself slipping when he got to the study. He sank down on the couch and your father bent over him. When he smelled his breath, he went to the door and called out to you."

"We heard nothing," Jacquith said.

"Hillerman heard your father shout 'Someone get this drunken slob out of here.' "

"We were right in this room," Jacquith said. "That's the study door over there. Mr. Bagley never called out to us."

"Jimmy?" I asked the Markham boy.

"I wasn't here," he said. "When Clyde went off to the study with Grandpa, I went to my room at the other end of the house. I wouldn't have heard if Grandpa did call out."

"The next thing Hillerman remembers is you shaking him, Mrs. Markham, and accusing him of killing your father."

"There was no question that my father was dead!" Rose Markham said, her voice unsteady. "Afterward, when the police came, there was no question the weapon came from his car!"

"Is it at all possible that you and Mr. Jacquith were out on the terrace when your father and Hillerman went into the study?" I asked. "You might not have heard him call out to you there."

"No," Jacquith said sharply, "we never left this room."

"They were gone so long," Rose Markham said, "I finally decided to see if I could get something for them. Coffee or something. And there he was, passed out on the couch, and my father dead."

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"Jimmy says that Clyde Hillerman was walking unsteadily when he went into the study with your father, Mrs. Markham. Clyde admits he was suddenly drunk—or had been handed some kind of knockout drops."

"It's *absurd*," Rose Markham said again.

I was sure I was on the right track. "Your father, an alcohol hater, must have sensed immediately that Hillerman was plastered. He called out to you, but you didn't hear him. So he lets Hillerman walk out, go to his car, get the jack handle, come back, and clobber him with it?"

"He was an old man. He couldn't protect himself against an athlete," Jacquith said.

"In the condition Hillerman was in, a child could have handled him," I said.

"One blow from behind was all that was needed to make Mr. Bagley helpless," Jacquith insisted.

"But why would he let Hillerman leave and wait around for him to come back?" I asked.

"The study was his private room," Rose Markham said. "He probably stayed there, trying to figure out what his next move would be to complete his team."

"He thought Hillerman was gone," Jacquith said. "He probably never dreamed the drunken oaf would come back."

It was going to be a tough story to break. I had to admit to myself that if I didn't know Clyde so well, I might have bought it. "Well, thanks for listening," I said. "I had to know just what I was dealing with."

"What you're dealing with is a murderous young punk," Jacquith said. "And, I suspect, the loss of a handsome commission for the next ten or twelve years. I don't blame you for trying to find a way out for him."

Jimmy Markham walked out into the front hall with me. "If you talk to Clyde again, Mr. Lewis, tell him I'm sorry things turned out the way they did. And tell him I didn't doctor his drink—if he really believes that. I've been thinking about that wink. If I did wink, it was to say, 'I'm sorry—what you see is what you get.' Not because there *was* liquor in the tea but because there *wasn't*." He looked depressed.

"I'll tell him," I said. I hesitated. "I get the feeling that Mr. Jacquith and your mother may be a little closer than lawyer and client."

Jimmy sounded like someone who'd answered that question for

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himself long ago. "Oh, I imagine they'll get hitched one of these days, now that Mom doesn't have to take care of Grandfather any longer."

"Your grandfather didn't approve of Mr. Jacquith?"

"I don't know about that. He approved of him as a lawyer. But if Mom had left Grandfather to get married, he'd have accused her of deserting him."

"But she's an adult. Certainly if she chose to—"

Jimmy smiled. "I'm talking about money, Mr. Lewis. Grandfather always had that hanging over all of us."

He opened the front door for me and I stepped out into the warm summer night. There was no sign of the cop with the gun.

Instead of going to my car, I walked around the corner of the house to the terrace outside the living room. Just as I'd expected, there was Hillerman, standing to the side, looking in one of the French windows. I went to join him and he raised a hand, indicating that I should be very quiet. Rose Markham and Jacquith were sitting close together on a couch. Her arms were around his neck and she was crying. "You've got to get hold of yourself," Jacquith was saying. "There's nothing to worry about. Everyone's bought our story, hook, line, and sinker. Even Lewis."

I pushed past Clyde and stepped into the room. "I took the hook, but that's all," I told them. "You set up the whole thing, didn't you, Jacquith? Framed Hillerman, murdered Bagley, and planned to sail off into the sunset with all that money." I stared meaningfully at Mrs. Markham.

Suddenly they were both on their feet and I found myself looking into the barrel of a handgun Jacquith had taken from his pocket.

"How was it?" I asked him. "Mrs. Markham prepared the knockout drink and then you answered Bagley's call to get Hillerman out of his study? You went in, found Hillerman passed out, pretended to try to move him, and managed to get his car keys out of his pocket? You told the old man you wanted to move his car closer to the house, park Hillerman in it, and leave him there to come to? Then you got the jack handle out of the car, came back, and murdered the old man. Did Mrs. Markham keep her father's attention away from you so you could slip up behind him and clobber him?"

"I think the police will believe my new story," Jacquith said with a smile. "Someone slipped in off the terrace unannounced. We had reason to be afraid with Hillerman on the loose and I fired at the

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intruder before I saw it was you." He raised the gun and began to aim it carefully at my heart.

"I don't think the police *will* believe that story, sir," I heard Clyde say behind me. "Not with three witnesses to testify against you."

Jacquith lowered his gun.

I turned, and beside Clyde was the cynical cop—with his revolver pointed at Jacquith. I supposed he had tracked Clyde to the window terrace.

Jacquith set his gun on the coffee table and stared at the cop with resignation. It took me a few seconds to realize he was waiting for him to read Mrs. Markham and himself their rights.

"Q"

The following epitaph was discovered, while doing genealogical research, by Alice Naomi Ovington, in History of Pelham, Mass. from 1738 to 1898 *by C. O. Parmenter, published in 1898 by Press of Carpenter & Morehouse, Amherst, Massachusetts. Our thanks to her for sharing it with us . . .*

Warren Gibbs,
Died by arsenic poison
March 23, 1860 Aged 36 years
5 months and 23 days.

Think my friends when this you see
How my wife hath dealt by me
She in some oysters did prepare
Some poison for my lot and share
Then of the same I did partake
And nature yielded to its fate
Before she my wife became
Mary Felton was her name.

Erected by his brother
Wm Gibbs.

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"Shut up, *you hear? Shut* up!" *Bill shouted.*

"Oh, don't carry on so," Honey said in her sweet voice. "Cindy's too dumb to understand. You didn't understand, did *you, Cindy?"*

"Huh?" she called back, slamming the fridge. Don't cry, she told herself. She would've liked to, though . . .

P. E. H. Durston, who is new to our pages, won a scroll from the Mystery Writers of America for her first novel, Mortissimo, *published first by Random House and later by Dell. A fact-crime book is on the way—as are, we hope, more stories as affecting as this one . . .*

EVERYBODY'S GONNA BE REAL NICE

by P. E. H. DURSTON

Some things she couldn't remember but she didn't forget that first morning. Even though nobody else was there, he wouldn't sit at the counter. He sat by the window. To be friendly, she asked, "What you readin'?"

He showed her his paper. Most of the words were too hard. He didn't know yet she was special.

They got talking while Babe was out back cooking his order—probably bacon and two eggs sunnyside up and hash browns, that's what he liked best. He asked her name and how old she was—hadn't believed she was eighteen already. Then he asked how much she made and she said she didn't know—her dad took it but he gave her back some. She showed him the twenty dollars she had to buy jeans at the mall. Maybe a T-shirt besides.

It was funny how he was at the mall, too, that afternoon. Babe had dropped her off to Sears and made sure she had the ad. She knew about getting the bus out home, she knew how to get around.

She was glad to see him again. He was old—thirty maybe. His having a game leg made her feel sorry for him. And he looked kind,

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with his droopy brown moustache and his thick brown hair. She didn't know then they were fakes.

He said his name was Bill Blake and he asked her if she wanted to go to L.A., where they made the TV shows and Michael Jackson lived and the movie stars. She'd already told him that morning how Dad beat her up when he got mad.

"Nobody's gonna do that to you in L.A.," Bill said. "I won't let 'em. Everybody's gonna be real nice to you."

So finally, after they talked a while more, she said, "Sure, okay. Is it far? How do we get there?"

She worried about not buying the jeans but it turned out all right. She did just what he told her. Perfectly. She waited out front till he picked her up in the green van—nobody she knew came along, so she didn't have to lie about waiting for the bus. Then they drove a ways. Then she bought the ticket to Albany like he told her, and took the big silver bus, not talking to anybody, which was hard. She liked to make friends.

Albany was the biggest place she'd ever seen back then and she was scared. But Bill was waiting—he'd promised he would be. They had hamburgers and he helped her write the postcard to her dad: "Gone to New York City Love Cindy" Not L.A., so he couldn't come get her and beat her up for running away.

They didn't go to New York City, though. They went to a mall. She looked at the pictures in Bill's paper while he went in. She would've liked to pick out the clothes herself, but, like Babe always said, "No complaints"—*two* pair of jeans, *four* T-shirts, a top, underwear, a new toothbrush and comb and makeup, which Dad didn't let her use.

In the middle of the night, while Bill was busy driving and she was supposed to be sleeping in the back, she thought to take the treasures out of the pocket in her old jeans and put them in her new ones. She was going to show them to Bill in the morning. Then she didn't. She was kind of mad at him for burying all her old stuff in the woods. That T-shirt was her favorite. It had E.T. on it.

In Buffalo he bought her high-heel shoes and a bag for over her shoulder and showed her how to put the makeup on right, so that was better. Not the hair, though—he took her to a beauty parlor, had them turn it kind of red, all frizzed up with a perm. She said she liked it just to please him, the way she tried to please him when he looked like he might cuff her because she was slow or asked too many questions where folks could hear, like about his leg which was

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all better now, or couldn't keep the shades hooked on straight to her glasses, which he said she didn't need but she held onto like she'd been told. Sometimes he'd laugh and look real ugly. "Christ! What am I doing with *you?*" he'd say then.

Just the same, Bill Blake was mostly pretty nice. He bought her a wedding ring, so they could stay in motels sometimes, like tourists. He let her eat all she wanted at McDonald's and Kentucky Fried—"Just don't bust out of them jeans!" he'd say. Most of the time he had lots of money. When he didn't, he'd park her in a movie and go meet a friend who gave him more. Vans, too, sometimes. They didn't have the green one for long. Once, for a couple of days, they had a Buick car. Dark-grey.

The only thing was, she didn't first like what he did to her at night after he took off the fake hair and moustache. Then she got so she kind of liked it, after all. In fact, the only things she didn't get used to were being on the road all the time and not being friendly to people.

That was why she thought she'd really like St. Louis. She'd almost forgot by then about L.A., after Chicago and Indiana and Memphis, Tennessee, and all the other places they'd been to. For now it was enough to be in Jake's and Honey's apartment and know they'd stay a spell—"till my hair gets long," Bill said. It was coming in blond just like hers really was, but he dyed his, too. Dark-brown. Anyways, that's what he told *her* why they were staying. To Jake and Honey he said it was till the stuff came from New Orleans. Either way, it didn't matter. What mattered was that she could do things for Honey, who was so nice to her—not like Jake, who only yelled about the things she mustn't touch and when he was drinking sat and ran his big fat hand over his big bald head and looked at her like she was a freak.

Honey was real pretty—lots of light-brown hair, down below her shoulders, and a tiny waist. She had long nails that broke if she did housework, but when the dishes were done and everything spick and span, she'd call out, "C'mon here, Cindy, and help me do my eyeshadow" or her mascara or the polish on her toenails—or they'd sit and watch the game shows on TV.

She really thought Honey was her friend. One night, when Bill and Jake were at the bar, she even got out her treasures—the pebble from the time her class went away to the shore, the silver medal a Catholic lady gave her, the pink ribbon her mom had tied her hair with before she went to live with Jesus, the earring she found that

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maybe was a diamond. She never got to the fur from her cat. The only reason was because Honey wasn't very interested. She said, "Yeah, yeah," and went over to the window, looking for Jake to come home. Then she paced around a lot like she was mad.

Next day, though, she was nice again. "Y'know," she said, "if you was to let your hair grow and lose some weight and get contacts, you'd be right pretty."

"Leave her alone," Bill said from the table. "I want her just the way she is." There was something in his voice that made Jake laugh.

"I gotta say you're smart, Vince," Jake said. She saw Bill scowl something fierce, so she got up from the sofa and went in the kitchen—casual, like she hadn't seen or heard.

Jake was still laughing away. "They stop lookin' up in the mountains, they start lookin' for a tall blond dude who goes for tall blonde broads with class and what've you got?"

Already Bill was shouting, "Shut *up*, you hear? Shut *up!*"

"Oh, don't carry on so," Honey said in her sweet voice. "Cindy's too dumb to understand. You didn't understand, *did* you, Cindy?"

"Huh?" she called back, slamming the fridge. Don't cry, she told herself. She would've liked to, though—she was that worried. Maybe if Honey thought she was dumb, she didn't really like her. And maybe if Bill pretended not just about his hair and moustache but about even his name—well, maybe Jake was right. Maybe Bill didn't really take to girls with short, red, frizzy hair like he said.

All the rest of the day, she tried hard to please them—Honey and Bill. She ironed Honey's no-iron tops like she wanted, and she didn't ask any questions when the phone call came and they got all excited. She didn't whine about her cramps or even tell Bill she'd rather be home to bed when he parked her at the movies.

"You stay here now, right through the last show. Understand? You stay right here till I fetch you. You promise?"

She promised. She really meant it. Anyways, it was Dolly Parton, who looked a lot like Babe. And it was good to get out of the apartment—she hardly went anyplace in St. Louis except to the laundromat and shopping with Honey. But then the cramps got worse and she got thinking how smart Honey'd think her if she could find her way back alone—she always did have a good nose for directions, everybody home said so. Besides, even if Bill got a little mad because she didn't stay past the first show, he'd been nice to her last time she had cramps. She thought about how nice he'd be to her tonight.

The streets were empty and she was scared. Then some fresh guys

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drove slow along beside her. Maybe she should have stayed put, like Bill said, but it was too late now. She started to run, looking for where to turn, where to go straight. Then she fell, not being used to going fast in the high heels. It was all right, though, because even though it hurt, it made the fresh guys laugh and drive away.

After that, everything seemed okay. It wasn't all that far and a guy going out of the building let her in, so she didn't have to ring the bell. She'd surprise them. She was specially glad she'd come back when she heard the music and the voices. She even thought to sit down on the stairs, look at her face in the little mirror like Honey did to be sure she was all nice for the party.

It was Honey opened the door. "What are you *doin'* here? You *dumbo,* you *moron!* Can't you get it through your thick head to do what you're told?" She turned away, like she was disgusted.

The room was full of people, all dressed up, all looking to the door. Except Bill. Bill was half lying on the sofa with a blonde girl. He had his hand in the front of her dress and he was kissing her real hard. Then he turned his head.

If her legs hadn't been so shaky, she would have run, he looked so mean at her. He was swearing, but she couldn't move—just couldn't take her eyes off the blonde hair, natural like hers had been. You could see when the girl stood up she was tall, thin, beautiful like a TV star, with a blue dress, purply eyeshadow, earrings like diamonds. "Who's your little friend?" the girl asked.

"My kid sister. I'm takin' her to L.A. in hopes there's another Hillside Strangler loose."

"What?"

"I'm just foolin'." He put his arm back around the blonde. "She's retarded, can't you see? Re*tard*ed. I'm takin' her to Texas to put her in a Home." He snickered, then said, "Why don't we move the party to your place? The kid's gotta sleep. Don't you, kid?" His voice was nice now, but his eyes were worse than Dad's had ever been.

And after they'd all gone out, whoopin' and hollerin', he came back just to say, in a quiet voice more awful than if he'd yelled, "You stay here now 'cause if you don't, I'll kill you. Disobey me just once more and I'll kill you."

Even then she probably wouldn't have done what she did if she hadn't got so cold. It seemed like hours she lay in bed shivering, because Bill wouldn't like it if she turned off the air-conditioning. She put on the sweater he'd bought her—you could see in the mirror

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how fat it made her look, so she searched in the closet for the one of his she liked, the tan one his friend in Chicago gave him, with the buttons down the front and the 'gator.

That was how she happened to get out his dufflebag. That was how she found the gun.

She remembered then Bill saying, "Don't ever touch my dufflebag, understand?" But it was too late. She wouldn't take his sweater now for anything. She tried and tried to get the gun back right in the towel, to tie all the knots on the rope the way they'd been, put the dufflebag way out of sight again, but she couldn't get things straight, the way they ought to be.

She knew then Bill would kill her for sure.

First she tried to get the window open, go down the fire escape, hide in the alley behind the garage, but the window wouldn't budge. Then she thought to go out on the street and yell for help. But there'd be nobody there—only men in cars, trying to catch her. Even if she got away from them, Bill'd find her.

She was shaking so hard she couldn't go anywhere, just back to bed. She got out her treasures, squeezed them in her hands, with the sheet pulled over her head, crying and praying like she hadn't done since her mom went away. She undid the plastic wrap so she could feel Goldie's fur. She bet Goldie'd been scared, too, when Dad threw him against the wall and he died, like she was going to do.

At first she couldn't figure out what was the hard little ball inside Goldie's fur. She'd forgot all about that day when she told Babe about the cat and Babe asked if Dad ever hurt her, too. She hadn't dared answer. Then Babe said if he did anything to the next cat, or she needed help in *any way*, she was to phone—did she know how? She did, so Babe wrote the numbers on a little piece of paper, saying, "Put this where your dad can't find it."

There hadn't been any next cat and she'd known better than to phone about Dad, so she'd forgot the paper. Now she smoothed it out, turned on the light, found her glasses. In St. Louis, the phone had buttons instead of holes and she wasn't supposed to try to punch them, Jake said. But if the party at the blonde girl's went on long enough, how was he to know?

The part you talked into and listened from wasn't put on right, so she fixed that first. Her hands weren't as shaky now. Real slow, she pushed the buttons, starting with 362, the way the paper said.

A lady with a funny voice answered, "We're sorry," then some

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stuff too hard to understand, then "Dial again." She did. Over and over. The lady kept saying, "We're sorry."

It was all no use. Bill'd kill her and the lady'd be sorry and there was nothing to do but sit there in the living room a while and go back to bed to wait. Babe had always told her, "You're special, Cindy. You may take a little longer than most, but keep trying." But she'd kept trying and it was all no use.

Then she thought of her mom with the Bible. Honey and Jake didn't have a Bible, so she took the big book by the phone with all the numbers in it. She closed her eyes, opened it up, and put her finger on the page. She looked at the numbers it touched and made herself say them over and over. Then, one by one, she punched them on the phone.

The first time a man hung up on her. She closed her eyes and tried another page, like her mom had done when she didn't like what came out. A real cross lady said, "Wrong number." Sometimes people seemed to listen but not understand, sometimes they got mad. She thought she'd run out of pages to put her finger on. She wanted to give up, go back to bed, but she was more scared of Bill than anything, so finally she stopped trying to make friends first and just said, real quick, "I'm special and I run away and I gotta call Vermont and I don't know how."

"Say that again." The man's voice was kind, so she did. Then he asked her name and where she was and where*abouts* in St. Louis, but that she didn't know. "I just know I'm in real bad trouble."

"Where do you live in Vermont?" he asked.

"On Dad's farm. But he'll be mad, so I'm calling Babe, who's my friend." And no, she explained, Babe wasn't special, too—she was a good lady who'd told her to phone if she needed help in *any way,* which she sure did now because Bill had a gun and he said he'd kill her. But, no, he wasn't there right now, nobody was, and she had to call Vermont before they came back.

"How did you happen to phone me?" The man sounded kind of funny now, but when she told him how come he just asked what number she was calling from.

"I dunno," she said.

"See on the phone where it says A-R-E-A, then C-O-D-E? Then 514? Read me the numbers after 514."

After she read him those numbers, twice, and Babe's numbers twice, she had to get a piece of paper and a pen from the kitchen

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and write 1 and 802, which was how you called Vermont *before* Babe's numbers, and write *his* numbers, too, which she'd forgot by then, since all the writing took so long. She was getting more and more scared Bill'd come back, but the man said before she pushed 1 and 802 and Babe's numbers, she was to count as high as she could—twenty—*three* times, slow.

It wasn't Babe who answered. It wasn't even Vermont. It was Las Vegas, Nevada, and she started to cry. But the lady said, "This happens all the time. You want 802—try again." And so, one last time, she finally did.

Babe was so excited she didn't make sense—said as soon as Mr. Lombard, whoever that was, phoned, she'd called the deputy, who was on his way over. "He'll know how to get you away from that Bill," she said, "and back home safe to Vermont, so hang on and *stay calm,* Cindy!"

That made her laugh. Babe was the one who needed to stay calm. *She* was fine, now she knew they weren't mad at her back home. She even forgot about Bill, she was feeling so good, but she answered all Babe's questions anyway, best she could, while Babe wrote it all down like an order.

She didn't know the street or the number, so she told about the house being red brick, she was three flights up, and there was one flight more beyond. She explained how she couldn't go to the other people in the house—they'd tell Jake—or out on the street, because of the men in the car—but she told Babe where the alley was, with the *blue* van now in the garage, and where the liquor store was, the laundromat, the little grocery and what they had in the window, the bar, the buses, and the restaurant two blocks down, where she wished she could eat even if it wasn't McDonald's. She explained where the Dolly Parton movie was and she'd started to tell what it was about when the deputy came on.

He wanted to know about Bill. It was funny how, after she said his other name was Vince, the deputy knew Bill's real hair was blond. By then he was all excited, too, talking about the evening news, didn't they have it out there? Then he got real casual, tried to persuade her to go out on the street and find a cop.

She told him she reckoned there weren't any cops in St. Louis. She was getting tired now. But he said to talk to Babe a bit more, then *him* again, then a lady broke in and asked if this was Cindy at—she said the numbers written on the phone. After that, the

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deputy tried again to get her to go out on the street—he just didn't know how different St. Louis was from home—but finally he said, "Okay, Cindy. Go back to bed and don't tell anybody you talked to us, got it? Hang up now. You'll be okay."

She believed him for a time. She put the treasures under her pillow where she could touch them. She even made it back into the living room and slipped the speaking part off the phone and put it back the way Jake had had it before him and Bill and Honey got the front door unlocked.

Her eyes were tight closed when Bill came into the room. Just for a second, she peeked. Jake was putting the phone on the right way, frowning. He picked up the numbers book and set it back straight. That was when she remembered she'd put the two pieces of paper in it—the one with Babe's numbers, the one the man told her to write.

She didn't have time to get sick to her stomach, everything happened so fast. First the phone rang, then Jake yelled, *"What? What?"* He listened real quiet a while and after came fast into their bedroom, turned the light on, mad like a bull. But it wasn't her he was mad at. "So they'll never find Art, isn't that so, ol' buddy? You buried Art so deep they'll never find him. Except they did. This afternoon. And you ain't in the Green Mountains, you're here. So get *goin'! Now!* And when you bury the moron, don't do it in Missouri. You don't dig holes *deep* enough for Missouri!"

Bill swore, shook her, and yelled, "Get up! We're leavin'!" He started to get his clothes out of the closet.

She couldn't move, trying to understand about Art, knowing Bill'd find the dufflebag real soon, see she hadn't tied it right. Jake pulled her out of bed.

She took her clothes in the bathroom and tried to lock the door but Jake got there first. Then Honey stayed with her, looking fit to kill, while she cried and got dressed.

Bill had the gun out when she got back to the bedroom. "I *told* you not to touch that bag, didn't I, Cindy? Didn't I *tell* you?"

"Oh, no, ol' buddy," Jake said from the door. He had a gun in his hand, too. "Not here. Not till you cross the state line. *Out!*"

Bill put the gun in his belt then. He handed her his suitcase and the plastic bag with her clothes. He picked up his dufflebag.

"My treasures," she said.

"What?"

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"My toothbrush—"

"You won't need no toothbrush!" Bill was pushing her through the living room, out the apartment, down the stairs, through the front door, round the corner into the alley. She never could remember whether she was more scared then or when, out of the darkness, the voice said, "Freeze!" and the bright lights went on.

Except for guns and noise and shoving, she couldn't remember much after that. There were too many people, too many cars, too many places, too many questions, it took so long before somebody understood to get her treasures and bring them where they'd be safe. And then, finally, she went on an airplane to Vermont.

Dad was real mad because they wouldn't give him the reward money to hold for her, but they wouldn't. Instead, they found her a place to live up Montpelier way, where she went to a new school with new friends—not a school like the one Dad took her out of but one where they did things she liked and she didn't have to try to read too much. Babe came once a month to visit.

Sometimes, though, she thought about Bill. She thought about him a lot when her hair first grew back—blonde and soft and kind of wavy, like before. She felt sorry for him, having to go back to prison, when he'd hated it so much he'd run away.

But she knew it was wrong of Bill to bash his friend Art and put him in a hole, as though he was nothing but old clothes. It was wrong of him to steal vans and money and the grey Buick. It was wrong of him to tell lies and deal dope—just like it was wrong of him to be mean to her and make fun of her and let her see him kissing the blonde girl and call her retarded, instead of special, like she was.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Some more questions got Bogue the information that Snohomish was a town about a hundred miles east of Seattle, and that Marian Gilley was a prizefighter with a record of 23 wins, two losses, and a draw—the 103-pound female champ of Montana and, as of last Friday night, of the entire Pacific Northwest, having decisioned Rosalie LaTork, the Crazed Croat, who had been reigning champ—or had claimed she was.

A new detective from Robert Twohy. We were especially won over by Bogue's cool and rather sweet suspension of disbelief and are thinking seriously of adopting it . . .

YELLOW ONE-EYED CAT

by ROBERT TWOHY

"Hey, buddy—this is it, Seattle!"

Which meant the end of a 1,000-mile busride that Bogue had taken because a small redhead had come into his office on lower Mission Street in San Francisco on Wednesday afternoon and told him she'd had a dream that had repeated itself the past two nights and she might be going crazy. She wanted him to go to Seattle and bring back some proof it had all been a dream. She laid $200.00 on the desk to show she was serious.

He had asked her for the story, and had gotten this—

At 2:00 A.M. the previous Friday, Marian Gilley had arrived at the Seattle bus depot and had noticed under a bench a yellow one-eyed cat looking at her in a way she didn't like.

"How was it looking?"

"Like some groungy guy in a bar looks at you when he thinks he's

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God's gift to women and would like to, y'know, show you why he thinks so."

"The cat was looking at you like that?"

"Well, sort of—or that's the impression I got." She had thrown a root-beer can at it but missed. The cat slid away and looked at her from behind things as she talked on the pay-phone.

She said that at this point the story wasn't a dream, but real—the dream had come later.

Bogue, making notes, asked which eye did the cat have?

Right eye, she said—left eye was just a slit. Ears were ragged, tail hung like a frayed rope, yellow fur showed lots of bald places.

Bogue had asked who she was phoning.

"Various hotels. The fight was that night. I needed a room and to sleep until afternoon, 'cause at three I had to catch a bus for Snohomish, which I'd get there just in time. But nobody had a room, or said they didn't."

Some more questions got him the information that Snohomish was a town about a hundred miles east of Seattle, and that she was a prizefighter with a record of 23 wins, two losses, and a draw—the 103-pound female champ of Montana and, as of last Friday night, of the entire Pacific Northwest, having decisioned Rosalie LaTork, the Crazed Croat, who had been reigning champ—or had claimed she was.

Bogue thought that Marian Gurney didn't look like a prizefighter. Rosy complexion, no scars or lumps, teeth in perfect order, bright blue eyes with lots of intensity, uptilt nose with freckles. She wore clean jeans and a nice suede jacket. He put her as about twenty-four.

She said there was no money in female boxing and passed him a card—*Lamps by Marian*, with a Union Street address and a phone number and, in a corner underneath, her name. "Fighting's just to keep in shape and because it's fun and I'm good at it. I guess everyone wants to be a champ at what they're good at."

She said that after phoning around and not getting a room, she had walked up the street toward a sign, *Superior Hotel*, a real dump, but she had to light somewhere. On the way a guy jumped her from a doorway, but she got him with a kidney shot and he changed his mind. At the hotel, she looked back and the yellow cat was looking at her around a pole.

"So it had followed you from the depot. Did you get a room?"

She had—311. She had locked the door. The window was about

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six inches open, and no way to close it—it was permanent that way—but with no fire escape or any ledge near, she felt all right. She lay down and in a while got dozy, and then she heard a scrapy sound and looked and it was the yellow cat crawling in the window.

"You saw it clearly?"

"Clear as I see you." The scrapy sound was its claws on the sill. She lay still—and suddenly it wasn't the cat but a tall shape against the window, a slim dude in a cloak. "I pretended to be asleep, peeking through my lashes, and he had two fangs. His face was white with very red lips—he had greasy black hair and one green eye glittered."

"Which eye?"

"The right. The left had a black patch over it. He spread the cloak and started down over me."

She had let him get close and off balance, then slid out from under and up on her left hip, feeding him a straight right to the mouth. Then she backed off the bed onto her feet and looked down at him. "His mouth was like you'd stepped on a tomato, one fang bent across toward the middle, where I'd connected."

She had rolled him over on his stomach, turning his head so he wouldn't strangle to death on his own blood. The sheets and pillowcase were a mess. She went down the hall to the washroom and wet paper towels, thinking to stop the bleeding or slow it, anyway, but when she got back to 311, he wasn't there.

"He'd gone out the door?"

"That's what I thought. But on the windowsill I saw small drops of fresh blood."

The detective thought things over, then summarized, "At two last Friday morning in the Seattle bus depot a yellow one-eyed cat leered at you. It followed you to the Superior Hotel. An hour later you saw or dreamed you saw it crawl in the window of 311, where there's no fire escape or ledge and the door was locked. Then it turned into a man in a cape with one green eye who came at you with fangs. You knocked him out, went to the washroom, and when you got back he was gone and a trail of fresh blood-drops, as if left by a small creature with a smashed mouth, lay across the windowsill, like he'd turned himself back into a cat and gone out that way."

"Uh huh. I pulled the sheets off and the pillow, turned the mattress over, and went to sleep."

"What happened next morning?"

"Nothing. I mean I didn't wake up until two P.M. I had just time to dress, get my stuff together, and make the bus to Snohomish."

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"Did you look on the windowsill for bloodspots?"

"No."

"Or at the sheets or the pillowcase?"

"No. I was in a hurry, and by that time I realized it had just been a crazy dream."

"But now, five days later, you're not so sure?"

She blew a sigh. "It was all so real. I've dreamed it the past two nights, the whole thing, from the time the cat came in." Her eyes were wide and a little glazed. "I might be going crazy. What I want is that you go to Seattle and poke around and bring back some proof it was all just a dream—so I can start to forget it." She nodded at the money on the desk. "It's a bunch, but it's cheaper than a psychiatrist—which'll be my next move, if you can't help me."

He had told her that he'd take the bus that evening and call her on his return.

Watching her trot down the hill to the staircase, he had reflected on how in the private-detective business you never know who'll come in the door, or what kind of problem they'll lay on you.

Four hours later he was on the bus to Seattle. In his suitcase were his mini-camera and a mini-tool kit, which he always took on a job.

When it got dark, he took from a pocket an eight-ounce bottle of sleep syrup. The directions said two teaspoons before retiring. He drank half the bottle and in five minutes passed out, coming to now and then but briefly. Breakfast call found him somewhere in Oregon. He had pancakes, sausages, and coffee and passed out again until someone poked him and croaked, "Hey, buddy—this is it, Seattle!"

At 3:30 P.M. in the bus depot, a lot of people were sitting or walking or standing in lines to go somewhere. Bogue hung around a while but didn't see a yellow or any other cat. He hadn't expected to—cats don't make the afternoon scene at a bus depot. Night is their time, when the mood is dark and still and there's room to slide around and look out from behind things.

He walked two blocks toward a sign, *Superior Hotel*. In the lobby, a few people were looking out the window. The detective asked an aged female clerk if 311 was available, and it wasn't. He said he'd take another third-floor room and got the key to 324.

He put his suitcase on the bed and the sleep syrup on the bureau, and walked down the hall and around a corner to 311 and knocked.

After a second knock he wiggled the knob. The door opened and he went in.

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A grey-haired man mostly bone lay on the bed, on the floor by which was a nearly empty fifth of Old Quaver. The window was open about six inches, and on the sill, among a lot of other stains that could be anything, were eight or nine small dark spots that could be dried blood.

Bogue spent about thirty seconds trying to move the window up or down, but as Marian Gilley had told him it was permanent where it was. He walked around to the top of the bed, took the mattress in both hands, and lifted, the grey head sliding off the far side. He raised the mattress high enough to view the top few feet of its underside, which showed a lot of stains, some of which were recent blood beyond much doubt.

He let it drop, took a shoulder and a handful of hair, and got the grey head back on level. Filmy grey eyes opened and a dim voice murmured, "Thanks. Who do I owe the pleasure?"

"Health Department. We're checking mattresses."

"Good. This one's terrible. Have a drink."

Bogue said he had to check some more mattresses and left, pausing at the door to turn the lock knob a few times, seeing that the bolt slid in and out all right. If Marian Gilley had turned it and assumed the door was locked, she was right.

He went out, walked a short way, and stopped at a surplus store, where after prowling around he found a toy he bought for 39¢, sliding it into a pocket. A block farther, he went into a meat market and bought a ¼-pint carton of liver gravy, which went into another pocket.

He walked around downtown Seattle á while, putting into a restaurant for a dinner of sorts. Then he walked some more and wound up at a movie house, cheaper than killing time in a bar. The movie was about the Australian outback, great scenery and an interesting plot. After twenty minutes he passed out, coming to when the lights came on. It was past midnight, the time for cats.

He went back to the hotel. The lobby was empty. In the cubbyhole office was a male night clerk, baldish head on his arms on the counter, a worn hat on his face as a shield from the 40-watt bulb overhead.

Bogue went upstairs and got the sleep syrup and his mini-camera, sliding them into various pockets, which also held the toy and the carton of liver gravy.

In the washroom down the hall, he washed and dried a tin soapdish he also found room in a pocket for.

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In the bus depot, a few people were lying around on benches. A ticket man at a counter frowned at a racing form. The detective walked around the place, didn't see what he was looking for, and took a bench.

He didn't know if the cat had moved on, died, or been arrested—but this was where it had appeared to Marian Gilley and might be its headquarters. He would wait a while, which a detective gets used to as he spends a lot of his working time doing it.

He watched the people sleeping. The ticket man worked on his form, now and then answering a phone or selling a ticket to someone who came in.

About 2:30, Bogue got a flash of something pale yellow sliding behind a drinking fountain about fifty feet away. He got out the soapdish and the carton and poured liver gravy into the dish, then got out the toy, which was a green metal bug that when you wound it was supposed to roll along with wings flapping creakily. He wound it, dipped its two rollers into the dish, set it on the floor, and watched as it took off across the tiles, wings flapping creakily.

He got out the sleep syrup and put a small dose in the dish, mixed it with a pencil, then set the dish under the bench and ambled across the room to another bench.

The bug had stopped under a far bench and a yellow cat with the mange was poking it tentatively.

The cat had one green eye and one slit, shredded ears, and a tail that hung ropily.

It sniffed the nearest roller, then took off along the trail the bug had left, sniffing the tile and occasionally testing with a pallid tongue.

It shot glances around, and Bogue gazed at a poster on the wall like a man with no interest in cats.

When next he looked it was crouched at the soapdish, lapping up liver gravy flavored with sleep syrup.

After a few minutes it uncrouched, arched its back, then moved a few steps, a little wobbly in the hips. The detective walked toward it. It quickened its front legs, but the rear ones didn't pick up the beat. The hips sagged and it sat down, with a look at Bogue like it knew it had been mickeyed and to who it owed the pleasure. It showed its fangs, tried a hiss which petered out, sighed, and fell over.

Bogue put it on the bench. He got out his camera and moved

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around, clicking off shots. He tucked the front lip up so the undamaged fangs showed and took some closeups.

In a while the cat came back from its nap, gazed around, focused on Bogue, hissed somberly, and slid off the bench, giving Bogue a routine slash as it passed, moving in fairly good style if not quite prime. It went behind a garbage can and when Bogue looked again it was gone.

He filled the soapdish with the rest of the liver gravy and put it behind the garbage can, tossed the carton away, and pocketed the sleep syrup. He left the bug under the bench. He went to the ticket man and found that the next bus for San Francisco left in two hours, at 5:27 A.M. He had the second half of his round-trip ticket in a pocket.

Back at the hotel, the night clerk lay as he had left him. On the wall behind him were rows of keys on numbered hooks, some hooks holding two keys, one with a tab and a dupe with a number taped on. Every hook had at least a dupe.

If last Friday about three A.M. the night clerk had been seized by an urge to visit a pretty redhead in 311, he had had access.

It was possible this clerk hadn't been on duty last Friday A.M. It was also possible a hotel resident had got over the counter and plucked the dupe to 311 from its hook. There were lots of possibilities—but the sure thing was that the bus left in one hour and thirty-six minutes and Bogue meant to be on it. So he'd start with this clerk.

On the counter was a bell you dinged for service. He had a finger out to ding it, which would bring the clerk's head up and show if the mouth had been recently mashed and if there were green eyes or maybe a single green eye, but he didn't ding, noticing to his left down the counter a saucer holding two dentures.

Stretching, he got a finger over the edge of the saucer and babied it close enough to latch onto the upper plate, leaving the lower in the saucer.

No teeth were missing. It looked like a routine, serviceable upper plate, no distinctive features.

But the more you look, the more you're likely to see, especially if you have an idea what you're looking for. Bogue concentrated on the two or three teeth to the left of the center pair and after a while noted that the second one left was a few hairs out of plumb, aiming slightly toward center, and had a few small scuffmarks.

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He studied the corresponding tooth on the right side, which was in plumb but showed the same marks—which none of the other teeth showed.

Bogue took the upper plate up to his room and got out the mini-tool kit. Sitting on the bed, he clamped a tiny wrench around the left scuffed tooth and twisted. The tooth moved a little. He got a new grip and twisted and kept at it until the end of the tooth stuck out below its neighbors enough so he could latch onto it with fingernails and twist. It came out easy now. He held it in his palm and looked at the tiny socket in the plate that it screwed into and out of, which was bent slightly inward. Probably it had been straightened after Marian Gilley had slammed it, but not quite.

He screwed out the other scuffed tooth, slid the wrench into a pocket, went to the bathroom, washed the plate and the two loose teeth, got a paper towel, laid the dental work on it, took it downstairs, laid it on the counter, and dinged.

The clerk slapped his hat on straight, sat back in his chair, looked up at Bogue, and asked neutrally [illegible]ed something. The old thin face had narrow green eyes and a mouth that was puffy on the left, like recently mashed.

Bogue pointed to the dental work and the clerk fingered his chin and murmured, "Been fairly busy while I slept, haven't you?"

The detective nodded. He had his camera out. The clerk watched him like none of this was any surprise. Bogue asked him to put in the upper plate, and he did.

"Smile wide," Bogue told him. He took three or four shots, moving for different angles.

The clerk asked, "Don't you have to say I have the right to be silent, and so forth?"

"No. Now I want some shots with the teeth in."

"I don't have my little wrench. I threw it away Saturday."

Bogue laid his own little wrench on the counter. The clerk nodded, took out the upper, got one of the teeth started into its socket, then used the wrench to tighten it.

Bogue asked, "Where do you keep the fangs?"

"I threw them away, too."

"Why an eyepatch?" Bogue was watching him thread in the second tooth.

The clerk shrugged, smiled in a vaguely jovial way. "For that little extra touch of spice. I threw it away, too. And the cape, the

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clothes, the wig, the makeup—everything. You can search my room if you want."

"Do you have a room here?"

"Not exactly. More an indoor outhouse." He had both teeth back where they belonged. "What now?"

"Put the plate in and smile wide." He took a few more pictures, using up the roll.

He got out his notebook, leaned on the counter, and got the clerk's name, which was Edward G. Burk. He asked if, when Burk had let himself into room 311 last Friday morning, he had seen a yellow cat.

"No. Should I have?"

"No. But she dreamed it came in, and a few seconds later you came in. That was one coincidence. Another was that the cat was missing a left eye and you wore a left eyepatch. A third was your eyes are green."

Burk murmured, "A regular plethora of coincidences."

It was 4:47 A.M. "Do you want to tell me the story?" Bogue said.

"Not very much."

"What were you trying to do in her room?"

"Not to hurt her. Just a gag, for laughs—to break the ice you might say, get off on the right foot as it were. Like the old days."

"What about the old days?"

For the next twenty minutes Burk told him.

The detective heard about a man who had been a swinging wine salesman in Chicago, the life of a lot of parties that were segments of one extended party that went on for years, during which Burk met and married four women, or maybe five, and barely remembered any of them or any of the other girls who floated in and out of the segments. It had been a party Bogue wouldn't believe, in Chicago in those years now gone.

Burk's best routine had been his Dracula act—he'd show up in sudden and unexpected ways and scare the hell out of somebody, or everybody, and they all loved it. Girls in particular—he had got at least three of his wives and a bunch of other girls with the act.

When one time he fell out a window on his face and had to have all his teeth pulled, he really classed up the act by having a dental lab make him the fangs and two sockets in the upper plate—so when he sold wine he wore his regular teeth and for the act he wore the fangs.

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"Did you ever bite any of the girls?"

"Oh no, no—it was just a gag, to get off to a flying start as it were. They loved it. Girls love to be scared out of their wits if it turns out happy—with laughs and lots of drinks and loving each other up usually, or often enough."

But parties end. The booze finally got to Burk, he lost his job and some of his marbles, his reflexes, and his bounce. The act didn't work any more, girls didn't think it was scary and funny, and he didn't have any more money.

"So now I'm sixty-seven, physically shot, night man in a dump in a town I don't know or like, with a drinking problem. I still had the Dracula suit, the fangs, the little wrench to put them in and out, the cloak, the wig, the eyepatch, the makeup, and now and then I'd dress up, all alone in my inside outhouse, look in the mirror, and the memories would come back—Chicago, music, drinks, laughs, and girls. All the girls."

"What happened last Friday?"

"Last Friday this little redhead came in, tired-looking—fragile y'know, sort of lost. I check her in and something happens, I mean in my head. I watch her walk to the stairs and suddenly I'm not an old clerk in a dump in Seattle—it's Chicago again, early Sixties. Party time. I'd seen a new girl and was ready for fun.

"I got the dupe to 311, went to my room, got out the outfit, screwed in the fangs. I thought, she'll scream and I'll laugh and pat her and show her it's a gag. Then we'll talk, get to know each other, have some drinks, and she'll like me, see I'm a fun guy, different, unpredictable and full of bounce, all that, all like it was. I slid a pint on my hip and went up and let myself in." He rubbed his puffy mouth. "I guess you know the rest."

"She knocked you out and you came to and she was out of the room."

"Yeah." He looked puzzled. "How could she do that? I mean, how could that soft-looking little thing one-punch me?"

"She may not be as soft as she looks."

"No, I guess not. I came to and all the craziness was gone. I was groggy and went to the window for some puffs of air, then out and downstairs and took off the outfit and screwed out the fangs. I cleaned off the blood and taped on some cotton and came back here to the office and waited for the cops. But they didn't come. And in the morning I never saw the girl. Are you going to tell her the story?"

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Bogue nodded.

"Tell her I meant her no harm—just a few laughs as it were. Just an old drunk who suddenly went nuts and thought it was Chicago and party-time again."

Bogue went to his room for his suitcase, came down, and said goodbye to Burk. He walked to the bus, and within an hour was on his way, with nearly four ounces of sleep syrup when he felt the need, which he did fairly soon.

In his apartment on Howard Street was a closet he had turned into a darkroom. Monday morning he developed the film and made 3 × 3"s, and hung them to dry.

He called Marian Gilley and told her he had some evidence. She said, "Good," but she was talking to a customer so please excuse her. She closed about 5:30, she said.

He walked to his office and talked to a few clients, doing some business but nothing interesting.

At 4:00 he walked home, put the prints in a plastic folder, showered and put on a clean shirt, and took a bus to Union Street. He walked three blocks and went into *Lamps by Marian*, a shop with lamps in the window.

She came to greet him in a peach-colored smock and jeans, gave him a nice smile, and said she had really been in Weirdsville last Wednesday. She said she realized now that Seattle had been nothing to take so seriously and she didn't feel she was going crazy any more—she hadn't had the dream since she'd seen him.

He showed her the prints of the cat and of Burk with his two teeth out and in, and told her the story Burk had told him. She said the pictures were nice and he had earned his $200.00 and that a female boxer isn't the most stable person usually, because of excitement and tension and getting punched in the head now and then, so she should expect every so often that she'd blow sky high and not take it so seriously next time—just wait it out and it would pass. That way she wouldn't be throwing away money. Not that she begrudged it—in fact, hiring Bogue was maybe just what she'd needed to show her how flaky her mood was and to lift her out of it. So in that sense he had helped her just like she'd hired him to.

He said he was glad to hear it. She thanked him for being conscientious and walked him around, showing him lamps—which he cared little about.

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He had had thoughts of taking her out to dinner but didn't. He left the prints, which he supposed she dumped in the wastebasket.

Anyway, the Seattle vampire case was solved and he could go on to the next case.

He took a bus to the tenderloin district of moldering hotels and apartments and crummy barrooms and shops, slouching past and draped against which were addicts, freaks, hustlers, hookers, pushers, narcs, gunmen, saints—victims and victim-makers, needing each other. He felt in the right place and murmured something.

A small brown woman with huge blonde hair called, "Say what, sweetness?"

Bogue gazed at her. "Down these mean streets a man must walk."

"That's cute—I like that. Kinda poetical, kinda sad. You make it up?"

"They made *me* up."

"Who?"

"The mean streets."

She sighed. "Me, too?"

He nodded and walked on. A man must walk alone down the mean streets.

A yellow cat working on some garbage in a garbage can stuck its head up and looked after him. It had frayed ears and one green eye and a slit for the other.

Bogue went on down the street and the cat went back to its garbage.

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a *NEW* short story by

ANNA CLARKE

Publishers Weekly *said of Anna Clarke's seventeenth novel,* Soon She Must Die: *"Endowed with vivid characters and terse plotting, this short novel recalls the very best stories of O. Henry and Maupassant."*

"You are a brave woman, Mrs. Cartwright," said Mr. Mundon. "I'm glad I have found you in time . . ."

MR. MUNDON'S MEMOIRS

by ANNA CLARKE

I very nearly didn't answer that phone call. My hands were busy with the omelette I was making for my lunch and my mind was deep in the story I was going to write that afternoon. Had I ignored the call, I should have been spared some pangs of conscience, but it is quite possible that a crime would have been undetected. It is also possible that a dying man would have had less peace of mind, but I may well be wrong about this. In fact, the only thing that is certain is that I should have written quite a different sort of story.

The call was from The Helping Hand Agency, for whom I did odd jobs to eke out my meager earnings from writing, and the voice was apologetic.

"I know it's awfully short notice, Mrs. Cartwright, but Mr. Ronald Mundon of Beechwood Way has asked if we can send somebody this afternoon and we've nobody else free to go."

This was the moment when I ought to have said no, but apart from being constitutionally incapable of doing so I also have an insatiable curiosity about people, and when I heard myself asking what sort of a man Mr. Mundon was I knew that both my omelette and my scheduled afternoon were doomed.

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"He's a new client," replied the voice. "I don't know anything about him except that he sounds old and he's very anxious for us to send a trustworthy and mature person."

"Not a day under thirty-five. That's me all right. Does he need a nurse or a secretary?" I have worked in both capacities. Sometimes it's difficult to separate the two.

"He wants somebody to type some letters," said the girl.

"It's probably just an excuse," I remarked. "I hope it's not one of your dirty old men."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Cartwright." The girl sounded shocked. "We don't have that sort of thing at this agency."

"You'd be surprised," I said. "But don't worry. Free-lance nurses and secretaries have to look after themselves."

The girl, reproachful now, said they would try to get me more than the standard fee, since anybody living in Beechwood Way must have plenty of money, and would I please keep a note of my hours and let them know? And so the fateful conversation came to an end.

Hillbrow House was a Nineteen Thirties luxury villa, distinguished from its neighbors by its less than immaculate lawn, its overgrown shrubs, and the slight smudginess of its white walls between the mock-Tudor beams. Somebody must have been watching my approach from a window, because the door was opened before I had touched the bell. Nobody spoke, however, and I stepped cautiously over the threshold. There is always something a little unnerving about the opening of a door when one has no notion of what it is going to reveal, and this feeling was heightened by the darkness of the house after the bright sunlight outside, and by the fact that whoever had opened the door remained concealed behind it as I moved into the hall.

"Will you come this way, please?"

The presence spoke at last in a weak and old but very courteous voice. The butler? Surely not. I realized then that I had been expecting a wife or daughter or some such female minion.

In a large sunny room, full of books and pictures and antique furniture, the owner of the voice revealed himself as Mr. Ronald Mundon, motioned me to a chair, thanked me for coming, sat down himself, and proceeded to go into an alarming choking fit that looked to me like heart or emphysema. I watched the struggle for breath for about half a second before I got up again and went in search of the kitchen.

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When I returned with a glass of water, I saw that he was trying to shift the lid of a little pillbox. I took it from him, laid a white tablet in his hand, and held the water for him to swallow. When the worst of the attack was over, I let go of his wrist and said: "I'll bring you some tea."

He smiled faintly, eyes still closed.

Five minutes later, we were both drinking weak, sweet tea and he was informing me that he had been much worse since his wife's death two years ago.

"You oughtn't to be left alone in the house," I said. "Who looks after you?"

"A housekeeper who is having the afternoon off and who is the reason why I have sent for you instead of for the agency nurse."

"But Mr. Mundon, you know nothing whatever about me."

"Exactly. That's the whole point. I know far too much about the people I have to deal with nowadays. With a sympathetic stranger I can at least have the illusion of human integrity. Wealth combined with great age and physical weakness does not necessarily make for happiness. I have no close relations left and my last trustworthy friend died a few weeks ago. I think perhaps you understand, Mrs. Cartwright."

"Yes," I said slowly, "I think perhaps I do."

In private nursing you come across these rich and lonely old people, often confused in mind, totally dependent on lawyers and on medical people. They are probably best off in a big hospital, where theft of patients' property is more easily detected than in private nursing homes, and where there is less opportunity of persuading a senile old person to sign a will whose contents he or she does not understand.

But public wards have many disadvantages, and in any case Mr. Mundon was not the least bit senile.

"Your solicitor," I began tentatively.

"The firm has worked for me for many years. Perfectly efficient and always well within the law. But the senior partner, who used to put on a good show of being personally interested in my welfare, has now retired, and his son is less good at concealing his primary interest in my affairs."

"You could change to another firm."

"I am too old and tired," he said simply.

I did not interrupt again.

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"I am also too tired to interview housekeepers," he went on. "The solicitor recommended the woman who 'does' for me now. She is slightly more competent than her predecessor, and it is a relief that she is not trying to marry me, but only aiming for a legacy. That has been provided for, and no doubt my lawyer will arrange a generous compensation for himself in return for distributing my estate among the charities named, but there remains one matter over which I have no control and which is worrying me."

He paused for some minutes, and there was nothing I could do but pour some tea and endure my own curiosity.

"This house and its contents," he said at last, "are to be sold and the proceeds go to charity. No doubt many of the items will never find their way into the auction room, but I have no longer the strength to give them away."

"An art gallery," I murmured, breaking my resolution not to interrupt. "The local museum—"

"They have not been forgotten, but there will still remain much that is of value, though of little cultural merit. My chief concern is my wife's jewelry. Ours was a long and happy marriage—I feel somewhat sentimental about it and should like it to be appreciated by a worthy recipient."

I listened with mounting apprehension. Was he going to offload thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds onto me to find a home for? Surely he must know *somebody*. But apparently he didn't. He was ninety-four and had outlived all those who had once been dear to him.

"Do you do these temporary jobs for a living?" he asked me next.

I explained my circumstances.

"And your husband?"

"He was a musician. Very brilliant, but unbalanced. He killed himself."

I didn't want to say any more. Even now, ten years later, it still twists me up inside when I speak of it.

"And no children?"

I shook my head.

"Nor close relatives or friends?"

"Some good friends, thank God. And a younger brother who has multiple sclerosis and has recently become so bad that I can't look after him. He's now in hospital."

I didn't mind talking about Jack. He's had a rotten life but he's a great personality and I'm proud of him and grateful for him.

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"You are a brave woman, Mrs. Cartwright," said Mr. Mundon. "I'm glad I have found you in time."

My mind, which had momentarily been diverted onto my brother, came back to the present situation with a fresh little jerk of apprehension. But all he said was: "I have been writing my memoirs. Nobody can possibly be interested in a tedious account of the life of a very conventional City gent, but it has occupied my time."

He got up and opened the bottom drawer of the desk. With a sense of anti-climax mixed with relief, I took from him a red-cardboard box that had contained typing paper and put it into my shopping-bag.

"The manuscript is not very long," he said, "and you will find here enough stationery to make two copies. There is no great hurry. Take your time. It may well be—" he smiled faintly "—that I shall not live to see my magnum opus in type."

"I'll be as quick as I can," I said in a businesslike manner, and I got up and moved toward the door, suddenly attacked by the suspicion that this extraordinary old man was going to ask me to help him to kill himself.

This fear proved unfounded, but he did detain me with further questions about my life and work, and eventually held my hand in both of his—they were very cold and very dry—and thanked me again. "God bless you," he said. "Be happy."

I said goodbye and begged him to take care. It sounded even more futile than such phrases usually do, but there seemed to be nothing else to say.

I got home feeling hungry and tired, vaguely anxious and rather irritable, because the story I had been going to write had quite gone out of my head and my mind was full of Mr. Mundon. His manuscript looked as uninteresting as he had promised, and after glancing at the first few pages I put the cardboard container on top of the pile of typing paper on my desk, deciding to work on it over the weekend. Tomorrow was visiting-hospital day and the call to the agency would also have to wait. The girl would want to gossip about Mr. Mundon and I didn't feel like it. The whole business had upset me.

The following evening I returned home to find a police sergeant standing outside the door of my flat. "Mrs. Elizabeth Cartwright?" he said.

My first thought was of Jack. But I had left him less than an hour ago, as well as he was ever likely to be again. The sergeant apolo-

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gized for troubling me. He was very young and rather unsure of himself.

"Just checking up," he said, "with everybody who was at the house of Mr. Ronald Mundon yesterday."

He had been in touch with the agency and I guessed, though he did not say, that quite extensive inquiries had been made about myself.

We stood in my little sitting room. On my battered old office desk lay a jumble of books and piles of paper, including the red box Mr. Mundon had given over to my trust. Neither I nor the policeman gave it a glance.

"Did you," asked the sergeant, "have the impression Mr. Mundon felt himself at risk in any way?"

"He had a bad attack of breathlessness while I was there," I replied, "and I gave him one of his pills and made him some tea. He had intended to dictate some letters, but he wasn't fit to."

"So in fact you didn't do any work for him?"

"I did no typing for him," I replied. This was strictly true, and I didn't know at that moment that I was plunging deeper into my dilemma. "What's happened to him?" I asked.

"He died yesterday afternoon."

With a great effort I stopped myself from saying that I was not surprised.

"The housekeeper found him in his study when she returned," continued the sergeant. "Death was due to—" he consulted his notebook "—emphysema."

"Then why—"

"We have been called in to investigate a matter of theft. The French windows leading to the back garden were found wide open, and according to the housekeeper and to Mr. Mundon's solicitor a number of small items were missing."

"And you think I took them?" I sat down, suddenly feeling weak. "Go ahead, then. Search my apartment. There's only the two rooms and the kitchen alcove. I share the bathroom with my landlady."

The young sergeant went rather pink. He really was not suited to the job.

"There's no question of a search warrant, Mrs. Cartwright," he said. "We are only asking you to help us."

I took a grip on myself. "What's actually missing, then?"

"Some pictures, some porcelain figures—"

He listed the items, and his further questions made it plain that

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the housekeeper was suspected. Personally, I felt sure that the burglary had been faked, but what I did not know was what Mr. Mundon would have wished me to do.

"He told me he felt very lonely," I said, "but I gathered that he was well looked after."

No, I decided, I am not going to try to throw suspicion on the housekeeper. Mr. Mundon seemed resigned to her and the lawyer helping themselves, and there's no question of unnatural death—and all I want is to be rid of the whole business.

"We didn't talk very much," I added. "Most of the time I was there he was recovering from his attack. I didn't want to leave him, but he wouldn't let me wait."

"Were the study windows open when you left?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes. They'd been open all the time I was there."

Fortunately, this was true.

"I believe you have nursing experience," said the sergeant. "In your opinion, was Mr. Mundon in a fit state to get up and shut the windows himself after you left him?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," I said. "But I don't see why he should have done so. It was a hot afternoon and he needed the fresh air."

The policeman departed at last. I had told no lies and yet I felt full of apprehension, and even guilt.

I sat at my desk, opened the box Mr. Mundon had given me, and took out his manuscript. Underneath it was about a hundred sheets of copy paper and a packet of carbons. I was about to lift this out when a knock came at the door. Only my landlady, ostensibly to inquire about my brother, but obviously longing to know why the police had called. Once again I was able to tell nothing but the truth and she went away satisfied.

By this time I was in such a state of nervous tension that I fussed around making quite sure the curtains were closely drawn across the window and the door was locked and there was no one hiding in the apartment before at last I returned to my search.

Not diamonds. Mostly emeralds and pearls, lightly wrapped in soft paper and hidden under the packet of carbons. Earrings, a neck lace, a pendant, and quite a number of other small items. I've never been very fond of jewelry and know nothing about it, but nevertheless I sat staring for some time in a sort of horrified fascination before replacing the stationery and Mr. Mundon's manuscript and shutting up the box.

After that I spent a sleepless night. . . .

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The agency telephoned in the morning and I told them exactly what I had told the police sergeant: nothing but the truth. Then I went back to the hospital, wheeled my brother's chair into a quiet corner of the grounds, and told him everything. I expected him to say that I ought to have called the police as soon as I found the jewels, but he didn't.

"Why don't you get them valued?" he suggested.

"But, Jack—won't the jeweler suspect?"

"Why should he? You can say they're a legacy. Which is strictly true."

"And what do I do then?"

"Keep them. If you think that's what he wanted."

"But they could be worth thousands!"

We decided in the end to sell them and give the proceeds for the relief of multiple sclerosis, but neither of us felt quite at ease. It is very difficult, when you have had the rigidly honest upbringing that we had, to quieten your conscience even when you know that your actions will bring nothing but good.

I took the jewels to a London firm of the highest reputation, and when I heard their verdict I laughed aloud with relief. They thought I was crazy.

Jack laughed, too, when I told him.

"Now I think you really must tell the police, Liz," he advised. "They'll be so pleased to have something to work on that they'll overlook the fact that you didn't tell the full story before."

So I did as Jack suggested, and in due course it emerged that the lawyer and the housekeeper had been in league together to fake a burglary and claim the insurance money as well as disposing of the treasures themselves.

But the jewels are another matter. The villains claim no knowledge of them, and they may well be telling the truth. Perhaps it was Mr. Mundon's wife herself who sold them many years ago, having first had the copies made to deceive her husband.

I like to think that this is the answer to the mystery, because it makes more sense than to believe that he gave them to me in this roundabout way in the full knowledge that they were made of paste.

"O"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Charles Simmons called out to Billy Oswald as he walked by. "Wait a minute, mister. You thinking of setting off them crackers?"

"That was my idea," Billy said. "Who're you?"

Simmons flashed his badge. "I better look them over."

Sheriff Lens quickly interceded, sensing trouble. "We got no law against it here, Mr. Simmons. If they're careful, we let it go."

The government man grudgingly handed back the package of firecrackers. "Okay, but be careful with them . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE FATAL FIREWORKS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Come in!" Dr. Sam Hawthorne urged, waving toward the vacant chair that was always at his side. "I was just pouring myself a small libation and I don't like to drink alone. Which reminds me, I was going to tell you about the warehouse full of bootlegged Scotch we discovered back in the summer of '32 just before the Fourth of July weekend. You'll remember it was our centennial summer in Northmont and there was lots of celebrating . . ."

The Fourth came on a Monday that year (Dr. Sam continued) and I guess Sheriff Lens had been looking forward to a peaceful holiday after all the excitement of the previous week. But early on Monday morning two well dressed men drove into town and showed the sheriff their badges. They were Charles Simmons and James Ready from the Prohibition Bureau's enforcement division, and they'd dri-

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ven in from the Boston office to take possession of the warehouse full of Scotch whisky we'd uncovered in Shinn Corners. Though it was a different county, Sheriff Lens had found it with me and he'd assumed temporary responsibility for it.

It happened that my nurse, April, was on vacation that week. She'd taken a cottage at Chester Lake and invited the sheriff and his wife Vera, along with me, to spend the holiday with her. Vera, in fact, had driven up with April early in the morning and we were supposed to join them around noon. I was in my new office in a wing of Pilgrim Memorial Hospital, having checked on a couple of patients, when Sheriff Lens phoned with the bad news.

"Doc, I don't think I'm goin' to make it to April's cottage by noon. A couple of Prohibition agents just arrived. I gotta ride over to Shinn Corners with them."

"I could meet you there and we could go on to the lake. It's on the way."

"Can't, Doc. I promised the Oswald brothers I'd stop by the garage this morning. I'll have to do that after I finish up in Shinn Corners."

I didn't want to disappoint April and Vera, so I tried to figure a way we could get everything done. "What's the problem with the Oswalds? Anything I can handle?"

"Well, maybe so. You know Max Webber has been tryin' to buy their garage. They say he's vandalizing the property to force them to sell. Somebody broke a window last night."

"I guess a broken window isn't serious enough to disrupt your holiday. I'll swing by after I leave here and tell them you'll be over in the morning."

"I'd appreciate it, Doc."

"Then I'll drive over to Shinn Corners and meet you at that warehouse."

"Fine. I expect they just want me to show them the place and then they'll take over. None too soon for me. I've had to have deputies guardin' it all weekend."

I locked the office and drove into town, heading for Oswald's Garage. A decade earlier there wouldn't have been a need for an auto-repair place in Northmont, but now probably half the people in town owned cars and only the Depression was keeping the rest from buying them. The Oswald brothers, Teddy and Billy, were both in their late twenties, and they'd been tinkering with Model T Fords for as long as I'd lived in town. Their garage, opened a year earlier, had quickly become a hangout for teenage boys who shared their interest

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in cars. Some folks complained about the noise in the early evening, but it was never excessive.

The firecrackers going off in the town square were making a lot more noise just then. There'd be a band concert later in the day, as there always was on the Fourth, but right now the square was given over to fireworks and cherry bombs and cap guns. The sound brought back unpleasant memories of a tragic murder only a few days earlier—one that had led to the discovery of the bootleg Scotch. That was history now, and I told myself I should be happy a broken window was the worst crime Northmont had to offer on the holiday.

Billy Oswald, the younger brother, was outside the garage when I arrived. He was still a kid at heart and I wasn't surprised to see him lighting the fuse of a firecracker as I parked the car across the street. He ran back about twenty feet and grinned as it went off with a satisfying bang. A few kids watched from a distance.

"How's the car running, Doc?" he asked when he saw me.

"Like a top, Billy. Your brother around?"

"He's inside working on a Chevy."

I followed him into the garage where Teddy Oswald was changing a tire. He was more serious than Billy but not quite as handsome. The girls chased after Billy and ignored Teddy, which seemed to be all right with both of them.

"I hear you got a broken window, Teddy," I said. "Sheriff Lens asked me to stop by and tell you he'll be over in the morning."

Teddy picked up a mallet and tried to remove a dent from the Chevy's fender. "It's Max Webber, I know it is. If I had his head here, I'd work on it with this."

Billy came around the side of the car. "It's Max, all right," he agreed.

"Why's he so anxious to get this property?" I asked. "You got an oil well under it?"

"He's got big plans for fixin' up the town. Wants to put an office building on this corner, with stores on the main floor." Billy had picked up a second mallet to help with the dent but he seemed undecided about how to proceed. Finally, Teddy sighed and took it from him, trying to show him how.

Just then, Dora Springsteen entered the garage. She was Billy's girl, a pretty blonde who worked at the soda fountain in the drugstore down the street. "Where's the window they broke?" she asked of no one in particular.

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"Back there," Teddy muttered. "We found that rock somebody tossed through it."

She picked up the small stone from the workbench. "This isn't much more than a pebble. You know, a big firecracker might have tossed that up in the air. Maybe it was an accident."

I had to agree with her. "There's probably nothing here for the sheriff," I said. "If you want me to, I'll talk to Max about easing off you fellas."

"Nobody talks to Max Webber," Dora said. "He comes into the soda fountain like he owns the place."

Billy Oswald opened a storage cabinet and took out two big boxes of firecrackers. "Come on, Teddy—let's close up and go have some fun. Hell, it's the Fourth of July."

I didn't like being reminded of the fact. Back in '24, soon after I set up my medical practice in Northmont, there'd been a July Fourth killing on the park bandstand. The day had seemed jinxed to me ever since, although subsequent Independence Days had been peaceful enough. "You've got enough there to blow up the town," I commented.

Billy hefted one of the sealed packages. "These are skyrockets, for tonight. The firecrackers can go anytime—like right now!"

I followed along reluctantly as the brothers and Dora crossed the street in the direction of the park. But our trek was unexpectedly interrupted as a black sedan pulled up alongside. I recognized Sheriff Lens in the front seat with the driver.

"Doc, this here's James Ready from the Boston office. And that's Mr. Charles Simmons in back."

I smiled at both grim-faced men. Ready, in the front seat, merely grunted, and Simmons got out to stretch his legs without speaking. Maybe they didn't like working on Independence Day, either. "Glad to meet you," I told them. "I thought you'd be halfway to Shinn Corners by now, Sheriff."

"I left the keys to the warehouse at my office—had to come by and pick them up."

Charles Simmons called out to Billy Oswald as he walked by. "Wait a minute, mister. You thinking of setting off them crackers?"

"That was my idea. Who're you?"

Simmons flashed his badge. "I better look them over."

Sheriff Lens quickly interceded, sensing trouble. "We got no law against it here, Mr. Simmons. If they're careful, we let it go."

The government man grudgingly handed back the package of fire-

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crackers. "Okay, but be careful with them." He got back into the car and closed the door.

"I'll see you in Shinn Corners," I told the sheriff as he pulled away.

"Cops," Dora Springsteen said. "All they want to do is cause trouble." She and I hung back as Billy walked across the grass of the town square. I watched him break the seal on the package and take out one of the medium-sized firecrackers. He stood it on the grass and reached into the pocket of his baggy shirt for a box of wooden matches. "Go ahead and *do* it, Billy!" his brother yelled. "Don't make such a big production out of it!"

Billy crouched down, his broad back to us, and tried to light the match. He turned in frustration and I saw him strike it again along the side of the box. Nothing happened. Finally, on the third try, the match broke in two. Billy stood up, frustrated.

"Come on, damn it!" Teddy Oswald shouted.

Billy took out another match and again failed to light it. Finally, Teddy ran forward and grabbed the matchbox from him. He took out another match, lit it on the first try, and bent to ignite the fuse as Billy walked away, grumbling. "They're my firecrackers, Teddy. At least you could let me light them."

I saw the instant flash as the fuse ignited and I knew something was wrong. Teddy must have, too, but he had no chance to move before it was too late. There was an ear-shattering explosion and a fiery flare that seemed to engulf Teddy as it swept out to catch Billy, too.

Then people were running and screaming, and as the smoke cleared we saw them both on the ground.

Teddy Oswald was killed instantly. His brother Billy suffered burns on his back and a possible concussion. I treated him as best I could at the scene and an ambulance rushed him to Pilgrim Memorial. Sheriff Lens and the others had heard the blast before they were out of town and hurried back to the scene. As soon as he saw what had happened, he decided to remain with me and send one of his deputies to Shinn Corners with the Prohibition agents.

"What do you think happened, Doc?" he asked as the ambulance pulled away.

"Damned if I know. A defective firecracker, I suppose. Couldn't be anything else."

The sheriff gathered up the scattered remains of the package of

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firecrackers. They'd been far enough from the blast so that none of them were set off, but he handled them gingerly nonetheless.

"Look at that hole!" he said as we gaped at the spot where the explosion had occurred. He examined one of the firecrackers in his hand and shook his head. "You know something, Doc? I think what went off was half a stick of dynamite. It would be just about the right size."

"How could that be? I watched Billy unwrap the package myself. It was sealed at the factory."

"What about the fuse?"

I nodded, remembering. "It flared instantly, like those long ones they use for setting off charges at mines and construction sites. Only it wasn't longer than a couple of inches, like these others."

"Doc, I could believe one mistake at the factory, but here we got two. The wrong explosive *and* the wrong fuse. What does that sound like to you?"

"Murder," I admitted. "But how?"

"You're the expert on these things."

"There's something else," I decided. "If it was murder, were both brothers the intended victims, or just Billy?"

"Billy?"

"He opened the package and tried to light that fuse, but he was having problems so Teddy took it away from him and lit it himself."

Sheriff Lens nodded. "I guess we better go talk to Billy at the hospital."

The staff doctors had done a good job of treating the burns on Billy's back, but he was still in some pain. He lay on his stomach, his head turned toward us. He was obviously in grief. "I can't believe Teddy's dead. Who would do a thing like that to us?"

"How about Max Webber?" the sheriff suggested. "You accused him of throwin' that rock through the window."

"Throwing a rock and killing somebody aren't the same thing, Sheriff. I can't believe even Webber would do a thing like that."

The sheriff had brought along the paper wrapper from the fireworks package, printed in bold red letters with the words: *One dozen Big Buster Firecrackers. Handle with Care.* "Could you show me how you opened this package, Billy?"

"I just tore the seal and ripped one side of the paper so I could take one out. I never gave no thought to it. Sam was watching me, weren't you, Sam?"

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"That's right," I agreed. "He didn't choose a certain firecracker, if that's what you're thinking, Sheriff. He just reached in without looking and pulled one out. Then he put down the package and the others spilled out on the grass."

Sheriff Lens nodded. "Is there anyone else who might have a grudge against you, Billy? You gotta realize that if that match had lit you'd be dead instead of your brother."

"No one could have known I'd use those firecrackers instead of Teddy," Billy insisted. "Just last night Teddy set off some skyrockets. Could it have been a mistake at the factory?"

"We think there was half a stick of dynamite in there, Billy. And the fuse was the wrong kind, too. Doc says it flared right up when Teddy lit it."

"I wish it'd been me," Billy muttered into his pillow.

We left him then, because Sheriff Lens wanted to examine the rest of the firecrackers and I wanted to pay a call on Max Webber.

I found him at his home on Maple Street, a few blocks from the town square, sitting on the porch reading the morning newspaper. He was a large man who more often than not had the butt of a cigar in one corner of his mouth. He was a community leader, but I hated to think that the future of Northmont depended on someone like Webber.

"Hello there, Dr. Sam," he greeted me, putting down the paper. "I hear there was an accident down at the square. My wife and daughter walked down to see what happened."

"Weren't you interested enough to go, Mr. Webber?"

He took the dead cigar from his mouth and gazed at it distastefully before replying. "The legs been bothering me. I don't get around like I used to."

"Teddy Oswald was killed in an explosion," I said. "His brother Billy was injured."

"That's too bad."

"There was dynamite in a firecracker, near as we can figure."

Webber grunted. "Awful mistake to make at the factory."

"Maybe it didn't happen at the factory. The brothers seemed to think you were harassing them, trying to force them to sell the garage to you."

"That's nonsense. I made them a reasonable offer for the property and they declined to sell. The matter is closed."

"Did you throw a stone through their window last night?"

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"Certainly not!"

He sounded sincere, but so did a good many liars I'd known. I saw his family strolling back from the direction of the town square and decided there was nothing more to be learned there. "The sheriff may want to talk to you," I told him in parting.

"He knows where to find me. Either here or at my office."

I went down to the jail and found Sheriff Lens at his desk. He was no sort of scientific detective, but I had to admit he'd done a first-rate job on those firecrackers. He'd cut off all the fuses and arranged them in two rows of six each. Then he'd taken a bit of each fuse and lit it to determine how fast it would burn.

"They're all slow-burning, Doc," he said. "Just like they're supposed to be. And the firecrackers are filled with the right kind of powder. There's no dynamite or anything else unusual here."

I nodded. "So it was only chance that Billy selected the one deadly firecracker. You can't make a murder case out of that, Sheriff."

"Unless it's one of your impossible crimes, done up so clever it don't even look like a crime." He swept the fuses into the desk drawer. "Well, I'd better get back over to Shinn Corners and see what them federal guys are up to. Want to ride along?"

"I think I'll take another look at the Oswald garage. Then maybe I'll join you. I still hope we can make it up to April's cottage before the day is over."

The garage was locked up when I reached it, and I was about to leave when I saw someone in the alley toward the back. It was Dora Springsteen and she had her hand through the glass of the broken window.

"What are you up to?" I asked, coming up beside her.

She withdrew her hand, careful not to cut it on the jagged glass. "Just testing a theory of mine. Want to hear it?"

"Sure. I love theories."

"That stone through the window didn't do much damage last night. But what if the idea wasn't merely to break the glass? What if the idea was to break into the garage?"

"It would be a tight squeeze through that six-inch hole."

"But my hand can go through. And it can reach the latch on the window."

Suddenly I was interested. I tried it myself and saw that she was right. The window could have been unlatched and opened to admit

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an intruder, then closed again and latched afterward in the same manner. "Why would anyone want to break in?" I asked.

"Those fireworks were kept in that unlocked cabinet. Someone could have climbed through the window and substituted a tampered package. It would be easy enough to cut a seal from a second package and glue it in place on the tampered one—if the person had the time."

I shook my head—in admiration, but she misunderstood.

"Well, how do *you* think it was done?"

"Maybe the way you suggest."

"By Max Webber?"

"The thought crossed my mind," I admitted. "I stopped by to see him earlier, but he denied everything."

"He wanted them out of this building."

"I know that."

"Do you think Billy is safe at the hospital?"

"I think so. Even Webber wouldn't be foolish enough to try anything else so soon. But I might suggest to Sheriff Lens that he keep a deputy there overnight."

She looked relieved. "I'd appreciate that."

I left her at the garage and drove out of town, heading for Shinn Corners. Dora might have a point about the window, but planting a dynamite bomb where anybody might use it seemed a heartless and unprofitable murder method to me. Before I was convinced, I'd need a method by which the killer knew exactly what he'd accomplish, and that seemed impossible given the events I'd witnessed with my own eyes.

When the warehouse came into view, I saw a big truck pulled up to the loading platform. The agent named Ready was in his shirtsleeves, directing a half dozen men who were carrying out cases of the bootlegged Scotch. I parked and walked over to him. "How's it going?" I asked.

"We're coming along."

"Heavy work for a holiday."

"We work when we have to. Criminals don't take holidays and neither do we."

I went on inside, looking for Sheriff Lens. The other Prohibition agent, Simmons, was directing work at that end and I was surprised to see that more than half the bootlegged whisky had been removed already. "It's our third truckload," he confirmed. "We work fast."

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"Where's the sheriff?"

"He was here and then he left—said something about going fishing."

I nodded. "Good day for it."

Sheriff Lens had never fished a day in his life.

I went back outside and walked around the warehouse. There was no sign of the deputy who was supposed to be on guard.

If the sheriff hadn't gone fishing, he was still around somewhere, and that meant his car was probably still around, too. I scanned the tall weeds and underbrush in the distance, searching for something I was afraid to find.

Then I saw the unmistakable sign of tire tracks. They'd left a recent trail through uncut grass, heading toward a dry stream bed just this side of the underbrush. I walked another ten feet and saw the rear end of the sheriff's car sticking out from the depression in the landscape.

"Hold it right there, Dr. Hawthorne," a voice behind me said.

Before I turned, I knew there was a gun on me. It was in James Ready's hand. "Am I violating any laws?" I asked him.

"Get back to the warehouse, wise guy. If you're so anxious to find the sheriff, I'll take you to him."

I had little choice, so I raised my hands and walked ahead of him to the warehouse. Simmons was waiting for me, also with a drawn gun, and he motioned me into a small office at the front of the building.

Sheriff Lens was tied to a chair and gagged. His deputy, a man named Oscar Frawly, was on the floor, apparently unconscious. I knew what was coming next and when I felt the sudden movement behind me I tried to roll with the blow.

The next thing I knew I was on the floor with a splitting pain in the back of my head. But I was still conscious, though I remained still while the door to the office was closed and locked from outside. Then I gradually sat up, rubbing my head.

Sheriff Lens grunted through his gag. I got it out of his mouth and he grimaced. "These guys aren't Prohibition agents."

"I figured as much."

"They're bootleggers tryin' to get the stuff outa here before the real government agents show up tomorrow. I recognized one of the truck drivers from a Wanted poster in my office and then they jumped me. They hit Oscar pretty hard."

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I bent to examine the fallen deputy. "He'll be all right. He's coming around now."

"Once they leave, we'll have to get to a telephone and call the state police."

"We might not be alive to do that," I warned him.

"Yeah."

I untied the sheriff and we worked over Frawly together. His color was good and I wasn't too worried about him. "What happened?" he asked when he was fully conscious.

"One of those hoods hit you with the butt of his gun," the sheriff told him. "Doc thinks they're going to kill us."

Outside we heard the truck starting up. Almost immediately another one pulled in. "This'll be the last load," we heard one of the men shout through the thin partition.

"Any ideas?" I asked Frawly.

"They took my gun." He felt in his pockets. "All I got's a firecracker."

"A what?" Sheriff Lens asked, unbelieving.

"I was settin' off a few of them over in the field. It's the Fourth of July, you know."

"Give me the firecracker," I said. "Quickly!"

It was smaller than those the Oswald brothers had, but I figured it would have to do. "What you goin' to try?" the sheriff asked.

"When I light this, we all hit that door together. If this goes off at the same time, they might think we've got a gun. It's our only hope."

The door shattered under our combined weight and the firecracker gave a satisfactory crack. The man nearest us dropped the case he was carrying and raised his hands. "I've got a gun, Simmons!" Sheriff Lens shouted. "Throw down your weapons."

Frawly grabbed the nearest man and wrestled him to the floor, disarming him. Others were raising their hands, and the fight seemed over before it had begun. Except that Simmons and Ready weren't there. They were outside, running for their car.

The sheriff ran out of the warehouse after them, waving one of the confiscated guns, and for an instant I was sure that foolish act would make him a dead man. The false Prohibition agents had already started their car, heading it directly at him. But he held his ground, firing at their tires, and in the last instant the car swerved, hitting the front end of the waiting truck and almost toppling over.

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"And this isn't even my county," Sheriff Lens muttered as he ran up to the car with the gun ready.

Simmons and Ready crawled out, bloody and defeated, their hands in the air.

"That was good work, Sheriff," I told him. "Your county or not."

"I wasn't about to let them escape," he told me. "I think these are the guys who killed Teddy Oswald."

After the local authorities took over, we finally were able to drive over to April's cottage on Chester Lake. It was there, sitting in big wooden lawn chairs near the water's edge, that we listened to the sheriff's theory of the case. April had cold lemonade for everyone and Vera Lens had brought some homemade cookies along. It was a relaxing time while we watched the sailboats on the lake and waited for April's dinner, which promised to be something spectacular.

"You see," Sheriff Lens was saying, "neither Teddy nor Billy was the specific intended victim. All they wanted was an explosion, with some injuries, so's I'd stay in Northmont while they went to the warehouse. They figured one guard could be dealt with easy enough if he became suspicious, as long as I was kept away. So they stopped the Oswald brothers and made a pretense of examining those fireworks. Of course, the Prohibition Bureau has nothing to do with fireworks, and they knew it. But while he was examining the package, Simmons substituted a doctored package he had with him. It was just luck that the dynamite was in the first cracker Billy tried to light, but Simmons knew they'd set off the whole batch pretty quick. First or last, the odds were someone would be killed or injured. That's all they wanted."

Vera took a long drink of lemonade and looked sorrowfully at the water.

"They had to clean out that warehouse before the real Prohibition agents arrived. And they couldn't let anything stop them."

I got up and strolled down by the water. After a few moments April came to join me. "What's the matter, Sam?"

"I don't know."

"Is it something the sheriff said?"

"I suppose it's as good a solution as any. Why should I worry about a couple of bootleggers who probably killed half a dozen other people?"

"Other people but not Teddy Oswald?"

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"I told you, I don't know. It couldn't have happened the way the sheriff says, but that doesn't mean he's wrong."

"Why couldn't it have happened the way he said?"

"Because Simmons couldn't have known Billy Oswald or anyone else would be carrying a package of firecrackers down the street at that particular moment—and he certainly couldn't have known it would be a package of Big Buster firecrackers. There was no way he could have had another package ready to substitute, and no way he could have switched something that large without one of us noticing. We were watching him every second."

"But if Simmons didn't do it, who did? And how?"

I didn't answer right away. Instead I simply stood there skipping a few stones out over the placid surface of the lake. The next thing I knew, Vera was calling us to dinner.

The food was as good as promised, and April surprised us all by producing a bottle of French brandy after dinner. "This is strictly by prescription," she announced. "I hope I'm not breaking the law, Sheriff."

"I guess I can excuse you on the Fourth of July," he said, holding out his glass.

It was after ten when we left April's cottage, and I drove the sheriff and his wife home. He was feeling good about the day, anxious to get back to Shinn Corners in the morning for a session with Simmons and Ready. I didn't want to spoil it quite yet by telling him he was wrong.

After I dropped them at home, I drove out to Pilgrim Memorial Hospital to visit Billy Oswald. He was still on his stomach, dozing restlessly, and the nurse was reluctant to disturb him. "I'll take full responsibility," I assured her.

Our voices had awakened Billy and he turned his head toward me. "How are you, Doc? Am I gonna get out of here soon?"

"I think you'll be released in a couple of days. You were lucky."

"A lot luckier than Teddy."

"Yes," I said quietly. "Tell me something, Billy. Why did you kill your brother?"

"What?" He started to rise from the bed.

"Stay there, Billy."

"That's crazy what you say, Doc! You saw me open that package yourself—if anybody tampered with it, maybe Webber or somebody sneaked in the night before!"

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I shook my head. "No, Billy—it was you. The fake firecracker containing the dynamite was hidden inside your shirt. When you bent down to light the fuse with your back to us, you replaced the real firecracker with the deadly one. You made two bumbling attempts to light it, knowing Teddy would take over for you as he always insisted on doing. But you didn't get quite far enough away from the blast in time and so your back was burned."

"I tried to light those matches! They wouldn't work!"

"Probably because you'd moistened the tips in advance. You made sure the rest were dry so Teddy wouldn't have any trouble lighting the fuse as you walked away."

"You say that's what happened, but there's not a speck of proof in the world!" Billy insisted.

"The proof is in the drawer of Sheriff Lens's desk. When you were injured by the explosion, you knew you couldn't let the real firecracker be found inside your shirt so you dropped it on the ground with the others as you fell. The sheriff picked them all up to test the wicks. I saw those wicks on his desk. There were twelve of them, one for each firecracker contained in the Big Buster package. But if Sheriff Lens collected twelve firecrackers, that meant the explosive one didn't come from the package at all—it was a substitute. And only you could have made that substitution, Billy."

He lay there a long time without speaking. Finally he said, "Teddy wanted to tie us down to that garage forever. Max Webber made us a good offer but Teddy wouldn't even discuss it. I figured with Teddy gone I could sell the garage and move away, start a new life. I wouldn't always be in Teddy's shadow."

"I'll have to call Sheriff Lens," I told him. . .

"And that was the end of my involvement in it," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "Billy committed suicide in jail while awaiting trial, but I was away at the time. Then something happened that fall that almost caused me to leave Northmont forever. I suppose I'll have to tell you about it the next time we meet."

"Q"

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$$$ LOOK AT THIS!! You can now get $100,000, YES, One hundred thousand to $500,000 "CASH" in as little as 50 to 60 days, with "E.I.E's" NEW multi-level Marketing program. We didn't believe it either, see for yourself!! RUSH $1 for details and application to: E. M. O'CONNOR, Box 26116, Washington, D.C. 20001.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SUNRISE, Box 415-D, Lewiston, NY 14092.

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FREE PRIVACY BOOK CATALOG. Discover latest low-profile techniques. Hide assets. Get secret loans, Keep mail, telephone confidential. Eden, Box 8410-AD, Fountain Valley, CA 92728.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY Banners. Giant six foot personalized banner. Example: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY MICHAEL". Send $3.95: Howell Banner Company, 7652 Quimby Avenue, Canoga Park, CA 91304.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Meet that special person—anywhere! Lowest fee. DATELINE, 316 Fifth Ave., New York 10001. (202) 328-1300, (513) 821-4600, (612) 888-1240.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people! 18-80, Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL—Cont'd.

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UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL. Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D.'s . . . without attending classes! Inexpensive, fast. Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-DP4, Tustin, California 92680.

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REINCARNATION—Your past lives are affecting your present. Learn how and why you reincarnated. Understand your karma and fate. Edgar Cayce based. Diagrams, illustrations, quality hardback. Send $10 or request details: Innervision-15, 1218 Eaglewood Drive, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23454.

FLORIDA opportunities! Looking toward retirement, new job, your own business. Wall's Florida Newsletter presents valuable information on housing, employment, living costs, culture, life-style, much more. Three monthly issues only $11.95. Wall's, Dept. CC, Box 347, Mims, Florida 32754.

RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

SPIRITUAL, religious poems wanted for musical setting recording. $1,000.00 for best song. Chapel Recording (S8), Box 112, Wollaston, MA 02170 (Talent Co.)

TAPES & CASSETTES

CBS MYSTERY THEATRES—Over 700 shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

TRAVEL

MYSTERY CRUISE—INTRIGUE and SUSPENSE April 28, 1985 on board luxurious TROPICALE. Eight days cruising Mexican Riviera from $945.00 including air. Crime Caper by John Ball (Author of In the Heat of the Night). Call for free brochure (800) 522-1500 Extn. 210, Mystery Cruises, 22030 Ventura Blvd., Suite A, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91364.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:
Mystery, Sci-Fi, or Special

OR TRY ONE OF OUR OTHER COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
(6) **$59.00**	(7) **$59.00**	(8) **$59.00**	(9) **$59.00**	(10) **$59.00**
(11) **$59.00**	(12) **$59.00**	(13) **$59.00**	(14) **$59.00**	(15) **$59.00**
(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound

NEXT ISSUE...

13 *NEW* stories—including

CLARK HOWARD (about animals)
ISAAC ASIMOV (about Griswold)
ROBERT BARNARD (about Jeremy Fortescue)
FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY (about a wilderness cabin)
GEORGE BAXT (about Handig)
SHIZUKO NATSUKI (about stairs)
ROBERT TWOHY (about a narc in love)
WILLIAM BANKIER (about murder in the cards)

plus a timely reprint

"The Crime of the Century" by EDWARD D. HOCH

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CARL BARTEE ..... *Director of Manufacturing*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 85, No. 5, Whole No. 504, May 1985. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.75 a copy. Annual subscription $19.50 in U.S.A. and possessions; $23.00 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

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GET $145.95 WORTH OF CHARTERIS, WESTLAKE, JAMES AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR $1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for $1.

You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil, terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost $145.95. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown for only $1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

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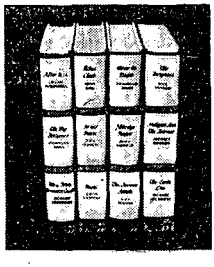

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5-JS
D21M8S

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
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DETECTIVERSE

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

by D. R. BENSEN

Though deviousness and ratiocination
Account for his main reputation,
Wolfe's best claim to perpetuity
Is his gastronomacuity.

© *1985 by D. R. Bensen.*

"Q"

THE DOCTOR IS WILLING

by RILEY HUGHES

Dr. Basil's always Willing.
Forensic skills he'll oft employ,
Probing those intent on killing.
That's how you'll know the real McCloy.

© *1985 by the estate of Riley Hughes.*

"Q"

A PEACHY LADY

by B. NICHOLS RANDALL

Said Meyer to Travis McGee,
"Anne Renzetti is something to see.
She's lived through two books
And it certainly looks
Like she's going to make it through three!"

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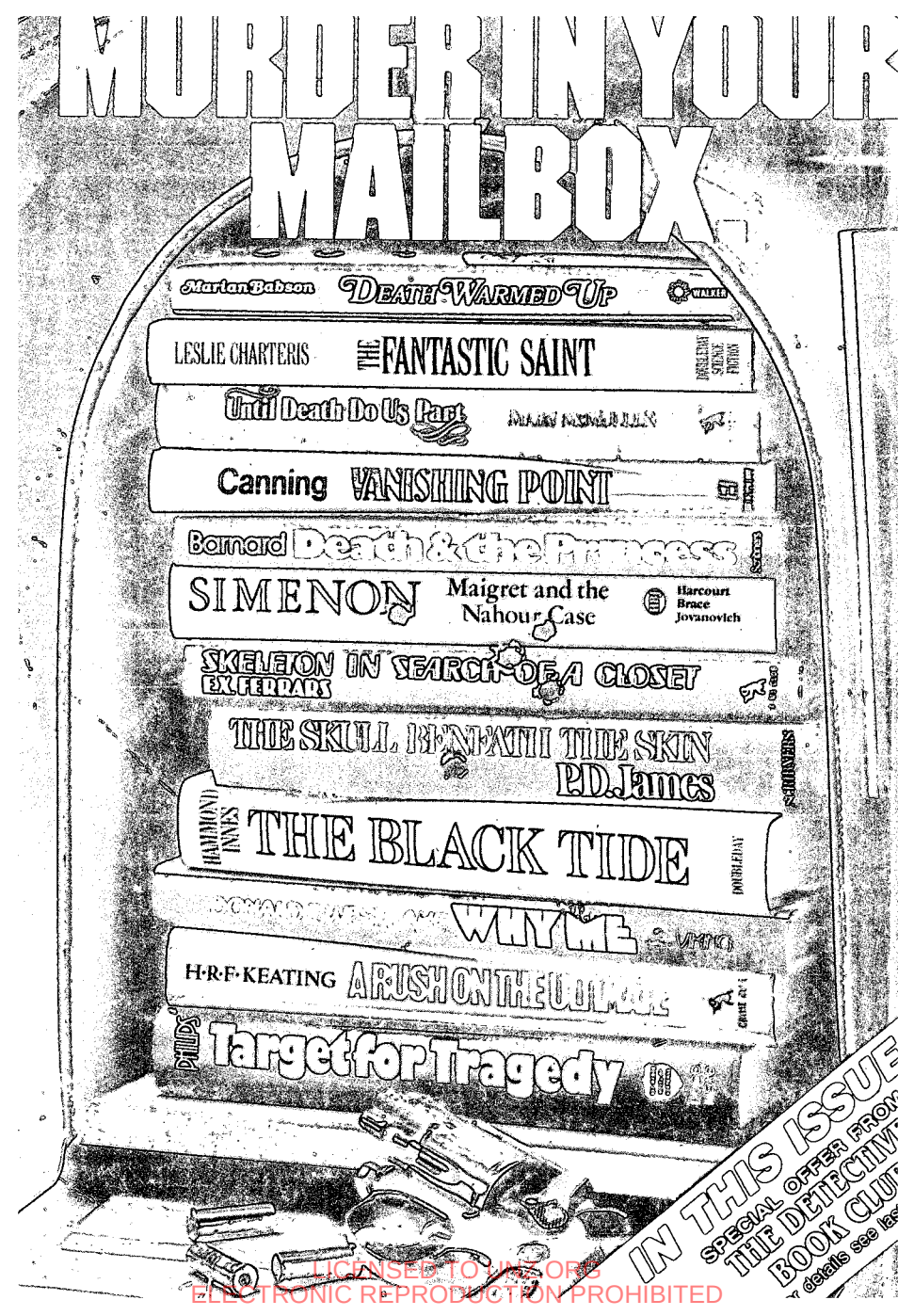

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